

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 359 173

SP 034 614

TITLE The Task before Us: A QuEST Reader.
 INSTITUTION American Federation of Teachers, Washington, D.C.
 PUB DATE 93
 NOTE 165p.; Published for the 1993 QuEST Conference by the AFT Educational Issues Department. Photographs will not copy well.
 AVAILABLE FROM American Federation of Teachers, 555 New Jersey Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20001 (Item No. 341).
 PUB TYPE Collected Works - General (020)
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC07 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS Academic Standards; Anthologies; Black Students; *Change Strategies; Disadvantaged Youth; *Educational Objectives; *Educational Trends; Elementary Secondary Education; *Excellence in Education; Family Problems; *Futures (of Society); Private Schools; Public Schools; Reading Instruction; Student Motivation; Student Problems; Teacher Salaries; Unions; Urban Education
 IDENTIFIERS *Reform Efforts

ABSTRACT

This publication presents a collection of articles about education drawn from magazines, journals, books, and reports. The collection includes 13 selections touching on key educational issues, challenging ideas, and proposals for change: (1) "First Born, Fast Grown: The Manful Life of Nicholas" (Isabel Wilkerson); (2) "Putting Children First" (William A. Galston); (3) "The Other Crisis in American Education" (Daniel J. Singal) about complacently maintaining that the top students are doing just fine; (4) "Do Private Schools Outperform Public Schools?" (Albert Shanker and Bella Rosenberg); (5) "Raising Standards for American Education" (National Council on Education Standards and Testing); (6) "Reach High" (John E. Jacob) about substantive goals for every African-American youth; (7) "Reading: Seeing the Big Picture" (John T. Bruer); (8) "Higher-Order Thinking Skills for Disadvantaged Students" (U.S. Department of Education's National Assessment of the Chapter 1 Program); (9) "America's Children and Their Elementary Schools" (David K. Cohen and S. G. Grant); (10) "Restructuring Teacher Compensation Systems" (Allan R. Odden and Sharon Conley); (11) "It Takes Two To Tango" (Patrick Welsh) about the fact that policy reforms will make no difference unless students are willing and motivated to work hard; (12) "A Prescription for World-Class Schools" (John A. Murphy); and (13) "What Should Unions Do?" (John Hoerr). (LL)

 * Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
 * from the original document. *

The Task Before Us

A QuEST Reader

ED359173

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

- ☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- ☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

W. Raut

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

*Published by the American
Federation of Teachers for the
1993 QuEST Conference*

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



3

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



The Task Before Us

A QuEST Reader

DESIGN: ANDREW BORNSTEIN/COVER PHOTOS: MICHAEL C. CAMPBELL, LEE BALGEMANN, KAREN R. PREUSS, EARL DOTTER/TITLE PAGE PHOTO: GREG BLACKMAN

*Published for the
1993 QuEST Conference
by the AFT Educational Issues
Department*



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



Contents

	Introduction	5
1.	First Born, Fast Grown: The Manful Life of Nicholas by Isabel Wilkerson from <i>The New York Times</i> .	9
2.	Putting Children First by William A. Galston from <i>American Educator</i> .	15
3.	The Other Crisis in American Education by Daniel J. Singal from <i>The Atlantic</i> .	25
4.	Do Private Schools Outperform Public Schools? by Albert Shanker and Bella Rosenberg from <i>American Educator</i> .	37
5.	Raising Standards for American Education from the National Council on Education Standards and Testing.	48
6.	Reach High by John E. Jacob from <i>American Educator</i> .	61
7.	Reading: Seeing the Big Picture by John T. Bruer from <i>Schools for Thought</i> .	65
8.	Higher-Order Thinking Skills for Disadvantaged Students from the U.S. Department of Education's National Assessment of the Chapter 1 Program.	85
9.	America's Children and Their Elementary Schools by David K. Cohen and S.G. Grant from <i>Daedalus</i> .	93
10.	Restructuring Teacher Compensation Systems by Allan R. Odden and Sharon Conley from <i>Rethinking School Finance</i> .	109
11.	It Takes Two to Tango by Patrick Welsh from <i>American Educator</i> .	125
12.	A Prescription for World-Class Schools by John A. Murphy from <i>The Charlotte Observer</i> .	133
13.	What Should Unions Do? by John Hoerr from <i>Harvard Business Review</i> .	143
	References	152

3

American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader



BEST COPY AVAILABLE



Introduction

THIS IS A BIG BOOK YOU HOLD IN YOUR hands, one that will require a significant investment of time to read from cover to cover, if that is how you choose to approach it. But as we tried to put together a collection of some of the most significant, interesting, and provocative writing about education that has appeared since the last QuEST conference in 1991, we realized it had to be a substantial volume. Otherwise, we knew it would fail to serve its intended purpose—to illuminate both the challenges we face and the opportunities we enjoy as we attempt to educate our students to achievement levels comparable to the highest in the world.

The thirteen pieces in *The Task Before Us: A QuEST Reader*, drawn from magazines, journals, books, and reports, do not constitute the definitive collection on education. But we think the selections touch on key issues, challenging ideas, and engaging proposals for change. One thing is clear from these pieces: There are no easy answers, no quick fixes. In education, the trend has been to jump from one fad to the next, each of them promising to be the magic bullet. That approach will not work; it will result in little change and much wasted time.

We chose these articles, in part, because they raise provocative issues, so some of the views the authors express are not always in accord with AFT policy. But regardless of whether you agree with everything here, the book deals with issues that we have to con-

front in order to bring about the kind of comprehensive, long-term changes that we have come to realize are necessary.

The volume is heavy on education policy, which can seem removed from the daily challenges of teaching. But by becoming well versed in the key issues that policymakers and school administrators are debating, teachers can become more active and effective players in those discussions. Who better than teachers can inform policymakers about the most productive routes toward improving schools?

You might recognize some of the selections from recent issues of the AFT's *American Educator*. The *Educator* regularly publishes significant and well-written articles on important issues related to education reform, and we thought many of them were worth including.

So we hope you will spend some time reading this collection, thinking about the ideas, and discussing them with your colleagues. You might even organize a discussion series around these articles that includes your staff and other key activists in your school community.

The collection begins with one installment of a recent *New York Times* series, "Children of the Shadows," which profiled ten different children whose lives are filled with the special problems faced by youths growing up in our cities. "First Born, Fast Grown: The Manful Life of Nicholas" provides a

5
*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

6
*The Task
 Before Us:
 A QuEST
 Reader*

vivid and moving example of one ten-year-old who is burdened with the responsibilities of a father as his mother studies to become a nurse while attempting to raise five children in a blighted Chicago neighborhood. It is no surprise that Nicholas has trouble excelling in school after he stays up past midnight many nights mopping floors, washing his younger siblings' school clothes in the bath tub, and putting them to bed.

While the problems of family breakdown are devastating in urban communities, they certainly are not confined to the cities, as William Galston makes clear in **"Putting Children First."** The economic, emotional, and educational effects of divorce and other forms of social disintegration have affected children across all segments of society. Galston's prescription is not to turn back the clock to a society full of families straight out of "Leave It to Beaver," but he argues that we need to put children at the center of our thinking about the family and social issues. And the government, he maintains, has a role to play in helping stabilize families through family-friendly policies in such areas as taxation and health care. Galston points out that family breakdown is a major cause of declining educational achievement across the board.

Daniel Singal's piece, **"The Other Crisis in American Education,"** takes on those who complacently maintain that our top students are doing just fine. In fact, Singal shows that even our college-bound students are woefully unprepared. Although most observers welcome the fact that growing numbers of students, and particularly minorities, are taking the SAT today, some have tried to attribute the recent decline in scores to this growth in the test-taking population. Singal challenges that notion by pointing out that minority scores have increased significantly. But the most compelling evidence of declining American performance is the dramatic drop in the number of students who score at the top levels of 600 and above. He relates the comments of frustrated professors, even at elite colleges, who report that huge numbers of incoming students lack the ability to comprehend difficult reading material, write well, or recall important factual information.

Given the vexing problem of poor student performance throughout the public school system, some have argued that the only solution is to subject schools to free-market forces in the belief that competition with private schools would force public schools to improve. But statistics comparing public and private schools show a flaw in choice proponents' assumption that market pressures create better-educated students. As Albert Shanker and co-author Bella Rosenberg reveal in **"Do Private Schools Outperform Public Schools?"** National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results

THOMAS NEERKEN



from various grades show that there is virtually no difference in the performance of public and private students—both groups perform miserably.

There has been a growing awakening that one key to improving the entire system is to ensure that students in every classroom are exposed to a stimulating and rigorous curriculum. In 1989, the nation's governors joined with the president at a national education summit and made a commitment to help the country meet the six national education goals. The goals included a call for U.S. students to master challenging subject matter in the core content areas and to become first in the world in science and math achievement by the year 2000.

To flesh out the meaning of the goals and devise a strategy to meet them, a diverse group of educators and other leaders was convened. Their deliberations produced **"Raising Standards for American Education,"** the landmark January 1992 report from the National Council on Education Standards and Testing (NCEST). In place of what it called our de facto national curriculum of low expectations and basic skills—set by textbook publishers and commercial testing companies—the NCEST report laid out a potent argument in favor of setting common national standards, comparable to the most rigorous in the world. The standards would guide instruction for students across all districts, not just those fortunate enough to grow up in neighborhoods where the schools persist in providing all students a challenging, rich curriculum. In addition, the report called for a national system of assessments—not just a single test—that would provide teachers, parents, policymakers, and others with information about how students, schools, and the entire system are progressing toward the goals.

The report argued for using national standards as the central anchor around which the entire educational system—everything from curriculum development and student assessment to staff development and teacher education—could be aligned. Systemic reform, as such a coordinated approach has come to be known, would bring focus and coherence to what is now a fragmented and conflicting clutter of educational programs at the national, state, and local levels. The hope was that the national standards would enable states to design their own broad systemic reform plans—pegged to these same high standards—that could provide clear and previously missing guidance for local districts and schools.

While the idea of "standards" may seem abstract, they are really just a way of formalizing high expectations, which many have argued are too often absent, especially from schools attended by large numbers of minority students. John Jacob, president of the National Urban League, a leading civil rights organization, recognizes the power of high expecta-

tions, and he also realizes that the rhetoric of high expectations has to be translated into real, meaningful goals. In **"Reach High,"** he lays out such a set of substantive goals for every African-American youth: They should graduate from high school with the ability to do calculus; be fluent in a foreign language; be able to research, organize, and write a twenty-five-page essay on a challenging topic; and live by strict, high ethical standards.

We can create rigorous standards, high-quality assessments, and sophisticated systemic reform plans, but these are just the prerequisites for reaching students who have struggled to master low-level material, not to mention the more challenging academic content and skills outlined in proposed national standards.

Equally important is a new instructional pedagogy that can help teachers elicit advanced performance in students of all abilities. Recent research about how the mind works and how children learn shows great promise in helping schools develop such powerful instructional strategies. *Schools for Thought*, a new book by John Bruer, provides an overview of the so-called "cognitive revolution," the findings of which have led to many impressive breakthroughs in helping students of diverse backgrounds and talents gain a deep and sophisticated understanding of complicated subject matter in a range of disciplines. **"Reading: Seeing the Big Picture"** focuses in detail on what scientists have learned about the mental processes involved in reading and describes some promising instructional approaches that grow out of this research. The book includes similar sections on writing, science, and mathematics.

"Higher-Order Thinking Skills for Disadvantaged Students," from the U.S. Department of Education's National Assessment of the Chapter 1 Program, draws on some of the same cognitive research to suggest that the federal Chapter 1 program needs to be refocused so that its goal is not merely to help disadvantaged students master basic skills in remedial programs but also to assist those students in reaching the levels of performance the research shows they are capable of. These ideas will be influential as members of Congress discuss how to change the federal Chapter 1 legislation in this year's reauthorization process.

In their sweeping look at **"America's Children and Their Elementary Schools,"** David Cohen and S.G. Grant move the discussion of schools from the policy arena into five classrooms in different parts of the country. The belief behind national standards is that the standards can guide—and ultimately improve—classroom practices. Cohen and Grant describe how policies from state capitals have made a difference in the way teachers teach, especially in language arts. This was the case across all five class-

7
*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

rooms they observed, even in the face of massive inequities in the resources available to teachers in the various communities. The authors describe teachers who, in response to state and district guidance, are moving away from basal readers in favor of real literature and an emphasis on the importance of comprehension.

But such policies have their limits, as well: As much as elementary teachers have altered their practices, Cohen and Grant point out, the changes have been incomplete. Most of the classroom discussion about books and stories, for instance, remains superficially focused on settings and characters rather than significant ideas. Their writing offers sobering insights into the enormous challenges of promoting large-scale changes in our fragmented and decentralized school system.

Cohen and Grant and countless others decry the lack of productive professional development available to teachers. Clearly, teachers cannot be expected to teach more advanced content and employ new and different pedagogical strategies without rich opportunities that allow them to continually learn new knowledge and skills and hone their practices.

Allan Odden and Sharon Conley discuss one little-considered route toward encouraging teachers' professional development: the teacher compensation system. In **"Restructuring Teacher Compensation Systems,"** they use lessons from successful private-sector organizations to suggest new ways of paying teachers. Rather than basing pay primarily on teachers' tenure and credits earned in courses that may have little use in the classroom, Odden and Conley propose a system that would reward teachers for upgrading their skills in areas directly related to helping students learn. That might include knowledge of specific content and pedagogy, detailed understanding of how students learn, and effective use of that content and pedagogy in the classroom. Acknowledging the importance of team work and collegiality, Odden and Conley would combine pay structures that advance individual teachers' knowledge and skills with school-based incentive plans designed to reward teachers and other staff for working together to improve the school's entire program.

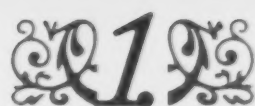
In the end, as Patrick Welsh indicates in **"It Takes Two to Tango,"** none of these policy reforms will make a difference unless students are willing and motivated to work hard. He describes a variety of ways in which schools and society have perpetuated the harmful message that school success depends more on innate ability than on hard work. Moreover, few rewards await students who devote themselves to their studies in the belief that their diligence will pay off. By admitting virtually any high school grad-

uate with the ability to pay the tuition, most colleges send a message that hard work does not matter. Welsh calls for more stringent college-entrance standards as one way to motivate students. Although he limits his discussion to the role of higher education, the same point applies equally to standards for entry-level jobs. Like college admissions officers, employers reinforce the notion that there is no point in studying hard when they do not even ask for applicants' school transcripts. Teachers and parents will have a tough time convincing students that it is worthwhile to work hard in school unless students see that their industrious efforts will lead to entrance into better colleges or access to good jobs.

John Murphy's **"Prescription for World-Class Schools"** takes many of the ideas that other pieces in this collection propose—higher standards, serious consequences for student performance, and ample opportunities for teachers to work together, to name just a few—and incorporates them into an ambitious plan to overhaul a school system. In essence, Murphy lays out systemic reform as envisioned in one school district.

If schools—and therefore, the work of teachers—are going to change in the dramatic ways that Murphy and the other authors outline, unions are also going to have to rethink their roles. In **"What Should Unions Do?"** John Hoerr looks at how unions in other countries and other industries have responded to changing conditions and new challenges. In many cases, unions have played a central role in helping companies adapt to new economic environments and become more competitive. Some, for example, have compelled employers to keep and retrain workers and employ them in restructured work environments that allow the employees to use their new skills more flexibly and efficiently. Perhaps the biggest challenge unions face, Hoerr notes, is developing their own human resources—their training capacity, for instance—so their leaders and members can acquire the necessary expertise to adjust to new demands. He does not focus on education, but teacher unions can certainly benefit from his suggestions. This is a crucial period of opportunity and challenge for American education, and as the most unionized sector of the American work force, teachers and their organizations need to take advantage of the chance to shape significant changes in our schools.

Again, we hope you find this collection valuable. We would like to know what you think about the book to see if we should make it a regular part of the materials you receive at future QuESTs. Send your comments to *A QuEST Reader*, AFT Educational Issues Department, 555 New Jersey Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001.



First Born, Fast Grown: The Manful Life of Nicholas

By Isabel Wilkerson

A FOURTH-GRADE CLASSROOM ON A forbidding stretch of the South Side was in the middle of multiplication tables when a voice over the intercom ordered Nicholas Whitiker to the principal's office. Cory and Darnesha and Roy and Delron and the rest of the class fell silent and stared at Nicholas, sitting sober-faced in the back.

"What did I do?" Nicholas thought as he gathered himself to leave.

He raced up the hall and down the steps to find his little sister, Ishtar, stranded in the office, nearly swallowed by her purple coat and hat, and principal's aides wanting to know why no one had picked her up from kindergarten.

*Copyright © 1993 by The New York Times Company.
Reprinted by permission.*

It was yet another time that the adult world called on Nicholas, a gentle, brooding ten-year-old, to be a man, to answer for the complicated universe he calls family.

How could he begin to explain his reality—that his mother, a welfare recipient rearing five young children, was in college trying to become a nurse and so was not home during the day, that Ishtar's father was separated from his mother and in a drug-and-alcohol haze most of the time, that the grandmother he used to live with was at work, and that, besides, he could not possibly account for the man who was supposed to take his sister home—his mother's companion, the father of her youngest child?

"My stepfather was supposed to pick her up," he said for simplicity's sake. "I don't know why he's not here."

9

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*



Nicholas gave the school administrators the name and telephone numbers of his grandmother and an aunt, looked back at Ishtar with a big brother's reassuring half-smile and rushed back to class still worried about whether his sister would make it home okay.

Of all the men in his family's life, Nicholas is perhaps the most dutiful. When the television picture goes out again, when the three-year-old scratches the four-year-old, when their mother, Angela, needs ground beef from the store or the bathroom cleaned or can't find her switch to whip him or the other children, it is Nicholas's name that rings out to fix whatever is wrong.

He is nanny, referee, housekeeper, handyman. Some nights he is up past midnight, mopping the floors, putting the children to bed and washing their school clothes in the bathtub. It is a nightly chore: the children have few clothes and wear the same thing every day.

He pays a price. He stays up late and goes to school tired. He brings home mostly mediocre grades. But if the report card is bad, he gets a beating. He is all boy—squirming in line, sliding down banisters, shirt-tail out, shoes untied, dreaming of becoming a fireman so he can save people—but his walk is the stiff slog of a worried father behind on the rent.

He lives with his four younger half-siblings, his mother and her companion, John Mason, on the

second floor of a weathered three-family walkup in the perilous and virtually all black Englewood section of Chicago.

It is a forlorn landscape of burned-out tenements and long-shuttered storefronts where drunk men hang out on the corner, where gang members command more respect than police officers and where every child can tell you where the crack houses are.

The neighborhood is a thriving drug mart. Dealers provide curbside service and residents figure that any white visitor must be a patron or a distributor. Gunshots are as common as rainfall. Eighty people were murdered in the neighborhood last year, more than in Omaha and Pittsburgh combined.

Living with fear is second nature. Asked why he liked McDonald's, Nicholas's brother Willie described the restaurant playground with violence as his yardstick. "There's a giant hamburger, and you can go inside of it," Willie said. "And it's made out of steel, so no bullets can't get through."

IT IS IN THE MIDDLE OF ALL THIS THAT Angela Whitiker is rearing her children and knitting together a new life from a world of fast men and cruel drugs. She is a strong-willed, twenty-six-year-old one-time waitress who has seen more than most seventy-year-olds ever will. A tenth-grade dropout, she was pregnant at fif-

10
The Task
Before Us:
A QuEST
Reader

OZIER MUHAMMAD/NYT PICTURES



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

teen, bore Nicholas at sixteen, had her second son at seventeen, was married at twenty, separated at twenty-one and on crack at twenty-two.

In the depths of her addiction, she was a regular at nearby crack houses, doing drugs with gang members, businessmen and, she said, police detectives, sleeping on the floors some nights. In a case of mistaken identity, she once had a gun put to her head. Now she feels she was spared for a reason.

She has worked most of her life, picking okra and butterbeans and cleaning white people's houses as a teen-ager in Louisiana, bringing home big tips from businessmen when she waited tables at a restaurant in downtown Chicago, selling Polish sausages from a food truck by the Dan Ryan Expressway and snow cones at street fairs.

She is a survivor who has gone from desperation to redemption, from absent mother to nurturing one, and who now sees economic salvation in nursing. Nicholas sees brand-name gym shoes and maybe a second pair of school pants and toys once she gets a job.

She went through treatment and has stayed away from drugs for two years. Paperback manuals from Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous sit without apology on the family bookshelf. A black velvet headdress from church is on the window sill and the Bible is turned to Nehemiah—emblems of her new life as a regular at Faith Temple, a Coptic Christian church on a corner nearby.

For the last year, she has been studying a lot, talking about novels and polynomials and shutting herself in her cramped bedroom to study for something called midterms.

That often makes Nicholas the de facto parent for the rest of the children. There is Willie, the eight-year-old with the full-moon face and wide grin who likes it when adults mistake him for Nicholas. There is Ishtar, the dainty five-year-old. There is Emmanuel, four, who worships Nicholas and runs crying to him whenever he gets hurt. And there is Johnathan, three, who is as bad as he is cute and whom everyone calls John-John.

That is just the beginning of the family. There are four fathers in all: Nicholas's father, a disabled laborer who comes around at his own rhythm to check on Nicholas, give him clothes and whip him

He stays up late and goes to school tired. He brings home mostly mediocre grades.

when he gets bad grades. There is Willie's father, a construction worker whom the children like because he lets them ride in his truck.

There is the man their mother married and left, a waiter at a soul food place. He is the father of Ishtar and Emmanuel and is remembered mostly for his beatings and drug abuse.

The man they live with now is Mr. Mason, a truck driver on the night shift, who met their mother at a crack house and bears on his neck the thick scars of a stabbing, a reminder of his former life on the streets. He gets Nicholas up at 3 A.M. to sweep the floor or take out the garbage and makes him hold on to a bench to be whipped when he disobeys.

Unemployment and drugs and violence mean that men may come and go, their mother tells them. "You have a father, true enough, but nothing

is guaranteed," she says. "I tell them no man is promised to be in our life forever."

There is an extended family of aunts, an uncle, cousins and their maternal grandmother, Deloris Whitiker, the family lifeboat, whom the children moved in with when drugs took their mother away.

To the children, life is not the neat, suburban script of sitcom mythology with father, mother, two kids and golden retriever. But somehow what has to get done gets done.

When Nicholas brings home poor grades, sometimes three people will show up to talk to the teacher—his mother, his father and his mother's companion. When Nicholas practices his times tables, it might be his mother, his grandmother or Mr. Mason asking him what nine times eight is.

But there is a downside. The family does not believe in sparing the rod and when Nicholas disobeys, half a dozen people figure they are within their rights to whip or chastise him, and do. But he tries to focus on the positive. "It's a good family," he says. "They care of you. If my mama needs a ride to church, they pick her up. If she needs them to baby-sit, they baby-sit."

IT IS A GRAY WINTER'S MORNING, ZERO DEGREES outside, and school starts for everybody in less than half an hour. The children line up, all scarves and coats and legs. The boys bow their heads so their mother, late for class herself, can brush their hair one last time. There is a mad scramble for a lost mitten.

11

American Federation of Teachers: A QuEST Reader

Then she sprays them. She shakes an aerosol can and sprays their coats, their heads, their tiny outstretched hands. She sprays them back and front to protect them as they go off to school, facing bullets and gang recruiters and a crazy, dangerous world. It is a special religious oil that smells like drugstore perfume, and the children shut their eyes tight as she sprays them long and furious so they will come back to her, alive and safe, at day's end.

These are the rules for Angela Whitiker's children, recounted at the Formica-top dining-room table.

"Don't stop off playing," Willie said.

"When you hear shooting, don't stand around—run," Nicholas said.

"Why do I say run?" their mother asked.

"Because a bullet don't have no eyes," the two boys shouted.

"She pray for us every day," Willie said.

Each morning Nicholas and his mother go in separate directions. His mother takes the two little ones to day care on the bus and then heads to class at Kennedy-King College nearby, while Nicholas takes Willie and Ishtar to Banneker Elementary School.

The children pass worn houses and denuded lots with junked cars to get to Banneker. Near an alley, unemployed men warm themselves by a trash-barrel fire under a plastic tent. There is a crack house across the street from school.

To Nicholas it is not enough to get Ishtar and Willie to school. He feels he must make sure they're in their seats. "Willie's teacher tell me, 'You don't have to come by here,'" Nicholas said. "I say, 'I'm just checking.'"

Mornings are so hectic that the children sometimes go to school hungry or arrive too late for the free school breakfast that Nicholas says isn't worth rushing for anyway.

One bitter cold morning when they made it to breakfast, Nicholas played the daddy as usual, opening a milk carton for Ishtar, pouring it over her cereal, handing her the spoon and saying sternly, "Now eat your breakfast."

He began picking over his own cardboard bowl of Corn Pops sitting in vaguely sour milk and remembered the time Willie found a cockroach in his cereal. It's been kind of hard to eat the school breakfast ever since.

NICHOLAS AND WILLIE ON BROTHERHOOD:
"He act like he stuck to me," Nicholas said of Willie. "Every time I move somewhere, he want to go. I can't even breathe."

"Well, what are brothers for?" Willie asked.

"To let them breathe and live a long life,"

Nicholas said. "Every time I get something, they want it. I give them what they want after they give me a sad face."

"He saves me all the time," Willie said. "When I'm getting a whooping, he says he did it."

"Then I get in trouble," Nicholas said.

"Then I say I did it, too, and we both get a whooping," Willie said. "I save you, too, don't I, Nicholas?"

"Willie's my friend," Nicholas said.

"I'm more than your friend," Willie shot back, a little hurt.

Once Willie almost got shot on the way home from school. He was trailing Nicholas as he usually does when some sixth-grade boys pulled out a gun and started shooting.

"They were right behind Willie," Nicholas said. "I kept calling him to get across the street. Then he heard the shots and ran."

Nicholas shook his head. "I be pulling on his hood but he be so slow," he said.

"Old slowpoke," Ishtar said, chiming in.

In this neighborhood, few parents let their children outside to play or visit a friend's house. It is too dangerous. "You don't have any friends," Nicholas's mother tells him. "You don't have no homey. I'm your homey."

So Nicholas and his siblings usually head straight home. They live in a large, barren apartment with chipped tile floors and hand-me-down furniture, a space their mother tries to spruce up with her children's artwork.

The children spend their free time with the only toy they have—a Nintendo game that their mother saved up for and got them for Christmas. The television isn't working right, though, leaving a picture so dark the children have to turn out all the lights and sit inches from the set to see the cartoon Nintendo figure flicker over walls to save the princess.

Dinner is what their mother has time to make between algebra and Faith Temple. Late for church one night, she pounded on the stove to make the burners fire up, set out five plastic blue plates and apportioned the canned spaghetti and pan-fried bologna.

"Come and get your dinner before the roaches beat you to it!" she yelled with her own urban gal-lows humor.

Faith Temple is a tiny storefront church in what used to be a laundry. It is made up mostly of two or three clans, including Nicholas's, and practices a homegrown version of Ethiopian-derived Christianity.

At the front of the spartan room with white walls and metal folding chairs, sits a phalanx of regal, black-robed women with foot-high, rhine-

stone-studded headdresses. They are called empresses, supreme empresses and imperial empresses. They include Nicholas's mother, aunt and grandmother, and they sing and testify and help calm flushed parishioners, who sometimes stomp and wail with the holy spirit.

The pastor is Prophet Titus. During the week he is Albert Lee, a Chicago bus driver, but on Sundays he dispenses stern advice and \$35 blessings to his congregation of mostly single mothers and their children. "Just bringing children to the face of the earth is not enough," Prophet Titus intones. "You owe them more."

Nicholas's job during church is to keep the younger children quiet, sometimes with a brother asleep on one thigh and a cousin on the other. Their mother keeps watch from her perch up front where she sings. When the little ones get too loud, their mother shoots them a threatening look from behind the microphone that says, "You know better."

On this weeknight, Nicholas and Willie are with cousins and other children listening to their grandmother's Bible lesson.

She is a proud woman who worked for twenty-two years as a meat wrapper at a supermarket, reared five children of her own, has stepped in to help raise some of her grandchildren and packs a .38 in her purse in case some stranger tries to rob her again. On Sundays and during Bible class, she is not merely Nicholas's grandmother but Imperial Empress Magdala in her velvet-collared cape.

The children recite Bible verses ("I am black but beautiful," from Song of Solomon or "My skin is black," from Job), and then Mrs. Whitiker

This is not the life Nicholas envisions for himself when he grows up.

breaks into a free-form lecture that seems a mix of black pride and Dianetics.

"Be dignified," she told the children. "Walk like a prince or princess. We're about obeying our parents and staying away from people who don't mean us any good."

The boys got home late that night, but their day was not done. "Your clothes are in the tub," their mother said, pointing to the bathroom, "and the kitchen awaits you."

"I know my baby's running out of hands," she said under her breath.

This is not the life Nicholas envisions for himself when he grows up. He has thought about this, and says he doesn't want any kids. Well, maybe a boy, one boy

he can play ball with and show how to be a man. Definitely not a girl. "I don't want no girl who'll have four or five babies," he said. "I don't want no big family with fourteen, twenty people, all these people to take care of. When you broke they still ask you for money, and you have to say, 'I'm broke. I don't have no money.'"

Ishtar made it home safely the afternoon Nicholas was called to the principal's office. Mr. Mason was a couple of hours late picking her up, but he came through in the end.

Nicholas worries anyway, the way big brothers do. He worried the morning his mother had an early test and he had to take the little ones to day care before going to school himself.

John-John began to cry as Nicholas walked away. Nicholas bent down and hugged him and kissed him. Everything, Nicholas assured him, was going to be okay.

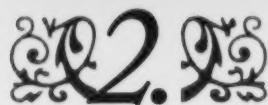
13

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*





BEST COPY AVAILABLE



Putting Children First

By William A. Galston

THE AMERICAN FAMILY HAS CHANGED dramatically in the past generation, and it is children who have paid the price. From Ozzie and Harriet to the Simpsons, from one breadwinner to two, from child-centered nuclear families that stayed together for the sake of the children to the struggling one-parent families of today; the revolution in the American family has affected us all. Divorce rates have surged, and child poverty has risen alarmingly. The signs are everywhere around us that America's children are suffering—economically, educationally, and emotionally. Although this fact is obvious, indeed increasingly obtrusive, it has hardly been discussed by intellectuals and policy elites until quite recently. Several broad forces—racial conflict, feminism, the culture of individual rights—help explain

this odd silence.

The story begins in 1965, with the publication of Daniel Patrick Moynihan's *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, which identified the breakdown of the black family as a growing obstacle to racial progress. Although intended as the analytical backdrop to major federal initiatives, it was received as a call for quietism, even as a subtle relegitimation of racism. Black civil rights leaders and white liberal scholars argued that the emphasis on family structure would inevitably divert attention from economic inequalities and would justify "blaming the victims" for the consequences of discrimination. As William Julius Wilson has argued, this enraged response had the consequence of suppressing public debate over, and serious scholarly inquiry into, the relation between black family structure and the problems of the ghetto poor—suppressing it for an entire generation.

Feminism also contributed to the silence. The postwar American women's movement began as a criticism of the 1950s family. "Liberation" meant leaving the domestic sphere for the world of work outside the home. It also meant denying traditional theories of gender difference that seemed to legitimate inequalities of resources, power, and self-respect. To be equal was to be the same: to compete on the same terms as men, with the same focus on in-

William A. Galston is deputy assistant to President Clinton for domestic policy. This article appeared in the Summer 1992 issue of American Educator, the professional journal of the American Federation of Teachers. It is an expanded version of an essay that appeared in the December 2, 1991, issue of The New Republic, with material drawn from Putting Children First: A Progressive Family Policy for the 1990s by Elaine Ciulla Kamarck and William A. Galston, published by the Progressive Policy Institute.

15

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

dividual separateness and independence. As Sylvia Ann Hewlett argues, the unquestionable moral force of the feminist movement muted the voices of those who, though dubious about its denial of gender differences and deeply concerned about its consequences for the well-being of children, did not wish to be accused of a disguised effort to ratify the patriarchal or chauvinist status quo.

Then there was the cultural upheaval of the 1960s, which yielded an ethic of self-realization through incessant personal experimentation, the triumph of what has been termed "expressive individualism." An increasingly influential therapeutic vocabulary emphasized the constraints that relations could impose on personal growth and encouraged adults to turn inward toward the self's struggles for sovereignty, to view commitments as temporary or endlessly renegotiable—to behave, in effect, like adolescents. This vocabulary was anything but hospitable to the discourse of parental continuity, commitment, and self-sacrifice.

A related legacy of the generation just past has been an impoverishment of moral vocabulary. What some regard as a descent into relativism is more accurately characterized as the relentless expansion of morality understood as the articulation of the rights of individuals. This development is not alien to the American experience, and it is not wholly to be deplored. Rights, after all, do support self-respect and offer protection against evils. Still, we now know that there is a difficulty: Although systems of rights can guide some spheres of life tolerably well, they can obscure and distort others. In particular, the effort to understand family relations as the mutual exercise of rights led to a legal and emotional cul-de-sac.

IN RECENT YEARS, HOWEVER, THE CLIMATE HAS changed. Debates within the black community, and among social democrats as well as conservatives, have helped to relegitimate the discussion of the links between family structure and a range of social ills. To acknowledge such links, it is not necessary to sever the causal connections between structural inequalities at the political and economic level and disintegration at the family level, or to focus exclusively on the "culture of poverty." The point is, rather, that the cultural effects of past discrimination can take on a life of their own, that they can persist even in the face of changing opportunity structures.

The women's movement is changing, too. In place of equality understood as sameness, feminists such as Sara Ruddick, Carol Gilligan, and Jean Bethke Elshtain have embraced categories of difference, nurturance, and care. Martha Albertson Fineman insists that public policy "recognize and accommodate the positive and lasting nature of mothers' ties to their children." Surely this style of feminist argu-

ment will prove far more compatible with traditional understandings of the family than anyone could have predicted a decade ago.

And even broader cultural changes are under way, provoked by demographic shifts. Baby boomers who delayed marriage until their thirties have discovered that the moral universe of their young adulthood is not a suitable place for parents with young children. Others have discovered that the casting off of binding relationships is not necessarily the path to liberation and happiness. A generation that once devoted itself to the proliferation of rights and the expression of individuality has begun haltingly to explore counterbalancing notions of responsibility and community; several polls have documented rapid shifts during the past two years in public attitudes toward a range of family issues.

The most important shift is a welcome expansion of concern beyond narrow bounds of race and class. For too long, worries about children and families focused on such issues as teenage pregnancy, dire deprivation, and collapsing marriage rates. These are serious problems, but they are disproportionately characteristic of the ghetto poor. Such measurements, in other words, enabled the American middle class, scholars as well as citizens, to believe that families and children were someone else's problem. But with increased attention to the clash between work and family, to parental time deficits, and to the impact of divorce, the middle class can no longer sustain such an illusion. The decay of the family is its problem, too. The children of the middle class are also at risk; and its choices can be just as shortsighted, self-indulgent, and harmful to the young as any ever contemplated in the culture of poverty.

THESE RECENT TRENDS ARE AT LAST PRODUCING important changes at the level of national politics. For decades, the revolution in the American family evoked a polarized reaction: Liberals talked about structural economic pressures facing families and avoided issues of personal conduct, and conservatives did just the reverse. Liberals habitually reached for bureaucratic responses, even when they were counter-productive, and conservatives reflexively rejected government programs even when they would work.

Both are wrong. Traditional conservatives' support for families is largely rhetorical; their disregard for new economic realities engenders a policy of unresponsive neglect—expressed for example, in President Bush's misguided veto of the Family Leave Act. Conversely, traditional liberals' unwillingness to acknowledge that intact two-parent families are the most effective units for raising children has led them into a series of policy cul-de-sacs.

Recently, however, this clash of conflicting

worldviews has begun to give way to a new spirit of accommodation. As E.J. Dionne, Jr., has observed, recent proposals for pro-family tax reform reflect the realization that both values and dollars count. Many younger conservatives are addressing social problems long neglected by their movement. Many younger Democrats, meanwhile, are looking for new forms of nonbureaucratic, choice-based public activism as a supplement to the frequently cumbersome and intrusive institutions of the welfare state. There is growing recognition that we must place the family at the center of our thinking about social issues and children at the center of our thinking about the family. We need policies that support and compensate families as they carry out their critical social role—providing for the economic and moral well-being of children. As we will see, a large body of evidence supports the conclusion that in the aggregate, the intact two-parent family is best suited to this task. Making this premise our point of departure takes us toward policies that *reinforce* families and away from bureaucratic approaches that seek to *replace* family functions.

To avoid misunderstanding, I want to make it clear that a general preference for the intact two-parent family does not mean that this is the best option in every case. Nor does it mean that all single-par-

ent families are somehow dysfunctional; that proposition would diminish the achievements of millions of single parents who are struggling successfully against the odds to provide good homes for their children. Rather, the point is that at the level of statistical aggregates and society-wide phenomena, significant differences do emerge between one-parent and two-parent families, differences that can and should shape our understanding of social policy.

I DO NOT MEAN TO SUGGEST THAT THE renewed emphasis on the family is solely the product of cultural and ideological change. Equally important is a broad process of social learning—a growing (and increasingly painful) awareness of the consequences of the choices that we already have made, individually and collectively, over the past generation.

The economic facts are distressing. As Hewlett summarizes the data: Among all children eighteen years and under, one in five is poor, nearly twice the poverty rate for the elderly; among children younger than six, the rate is almost one in four; among children in families headed by adults younger than thirty, one in three; among black children, almost one in two. And noneconomic trends are no less stark. In the past quarter-century, the amount of time that parents spend with their children has dropped by 40 percent, from thirty hours a week to just seventeen; and there is no evidence that these remaining shreds of parental availability represent “quality time.” On the contrary: As social historian Barbara Whitehead reports, “Increasingly, family schedules are intricate applications of time-motion principles.”

These stress-filled lives reflect changes in the economy that have prompted momentous shifts in the labor force in this country. Since 1973, under the pressure of declining productivity and mounting international competition, family incomes have stagnated while the relative costs of a middle-class existence—in particular, of homeownership, health care, and higher education—have soared. Wage prospects have grown increasingly dismal, especially for young people with no more than a high school education. The surge of women into the work force may have begun three decades ago as a cultural revolt against household roles experienced as stifling, but it has been sustained by increasingly urgent economic necessity. Today two-thirds of all mothers with children younger than eighteen do at least some work outside the home, as do more than one-half of all mothers with children under five.

For tens of millions of American families, the second income means the difference between keeping and losing a tenuously maintained middle-class way of life. To be sure, some adjustments at the margin

Books Reviewed

When the Bough Breaks:

The Cost of Neglecting Our Children
by Sylvia Ann Hewlett
(Basic Books, 346 pp., \$22.95)

Divided Families:

What Happens to Children When Parents Part
by Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., and
Andrew J. Cherlin
(Harvard University Press, 142 pp., \$18.95)

The Illusion of Equality:

The Rhetoric and Reality of Divorce Reform
by Martha Albertson Fineman
(University of Chicago Press,
252 pp., \$27.50)

Rebuilding the Nest

edited by David Blankenhorn,
Steven Bayme, and
Jean Bethke Elshtain
(Family Service America, 264 pp., \$16.95)

Childhood's Future

by Richard Louv
(Houghton Mifflin, 420 pp., \$21.95)

Brave New Families

by Judith Stacey
(Basic Books, 328 pp. \$22.95,
\$13 paper)

The Minimal Family

by Jan E. Dizard and Howard Gadlin
(University of Massachusetts Press, 304 pp., \$22.95)

17

American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader

are possible: Young families can live in smaller houses and stop eating at restaurants. Still, the hope of many moral traditionalists that the 1950s family can somehow be restored flies in the face of contemporary market forces. The tension between remunerative work and family time will not be overcome in the foreseeable future—unless increased income from nonmarket sources allows parents with young children to do less work outside the home. Many thoughtful conservatives are coming to the realization that they must choose between their vision of a well-ordered family and their desire for smaller, less costly government.

THESE TENSIONS AND OTHERS HAVE CLEARLY taken their toll. Test scores are down, and not just the much-discussed SATs. At Bell-South in Atlanta, for example, only about 10 percent of job applicants can pass exams that test basic learning ability, versus 20 percent a decade ago. Theft, violence, and the use of illicit drugs are far more prevalent among teenagers than they were thirty years ago; and the rate of suicide among teenagers has tripled.

It is tempting to dismiss these data as one sided, or to interpret them as mere cyclical variations within longer-term stability. After all, virtually every generation in every culture has complained of a decline of the family. But this is an alibi. We must face the fact that the conditions we take for granted are the product of a social revolution that has rapidly unfolded over just the past three decades. And at the heart of this revolution lie changes in family structure.

In thirty years, the percentage of children born outside of marriage has quintupled, and now stands at 18 percent for whites and 63 percent for blacks. In this same period, the divorce rate has tripled, as has the percentage of children living with only one parent. Of white children born in the early 1950s, 81 percent lived continuously until the age of seventeen with their two biological parents; the projected rate for children born in the early 1980s is 30 percent. The corresponding rate for black children has fallen from 52 percent in the 1950s to only 6 percent today.

These structural shifts are responsible for a substantial portion of child poverty. As David Ellwood has observed, "[t]he vast majority of children who are raised entirely in a two-parent home will never be poor during childhood. By contrast, the vast majority of children who spend time in a single-parent home will experience poverty." As Ellwood showed in *Poor Support*, in any given year, fully 50 percent of children in one-parent families will experience poverty, versus 15 percent for those in two-parent families; 73 percent of children from one-parent families will experience poverty at some point dur-

ing their childhood, versus 20 percent for children from two-parent families; 22 percent of children from one-parent families will experience persistent poverty (seven years or more), versus only 2 percent from two-parent families.

These data suggest that the best anti-poverty program for children is a stable, intact family. And this conclusion holds even for families headed by younger parents with very modest levels of educational attainment. For married high school graduates with children, the 1987 poverty rate was 9 percent, versus more than 47 percent for families headed by female high school graduates. Even for married high school dropouts with children, the poverty rate was 25 percent, versus more than 81 percent for families headed by female high school dropouts. Overall, Frank Furstenberg, Jr., and Andrew Cherlin conclude, the differences in family structure go "a long way toward accounting for the enormous racial disparity in poverty rates. Within family types, black families are still poorer than white families; but the racial gap in poverty shrinks considerably when the marital status of the household head is taken into account."

TO BE SURE, THE CAUSAL ARROW COULD point in the opposite direction: differences in family structure might be thought to reflect differences in economic status. Wilson offered an influential statement of this counterthesis in *The Truly Disadvantaged*: Reduced black marriage rates reflect dramatically higher rates of black male unemployment, which reduces the "male marriageable pool"—under the assumption that "to be marriageable a man needs to be employed." But the most recent research offers only modest support for this hypothesis. Robert Mare and Christopher Winship find that changes in employment rates among young black males account for only 20 percent of the decline in their marriage rates since 1960; they speculate that the various family disruptions of the past three decades may be self-reinforcing.¹ Though Wilson continues to defend the validity of his thesis for the hard-hit central cities of the Northeast and Midwest, he is now willing to say that "the decline in marriage among inner-city blacks is not simply a function of the proportion of jobless men . . . it is reasonable to consider the effects of weaker social structures against out-of-wedlock births."

Along with family non-formation, family breakup is a potent source of poverty, especially among children. According to a recently released Census Bureau study by Susan Bianchi, who identified and tracked twenty thousand households, it turns out that after their parents separate or divorce, children are almost twice as likely to be living in poverty as they were before the split. The gross in-

come of the children and their custodial parent (usually the mother) dropped by 37 percent immediately after the family breakup (26 percent after adjustment for the decline in family size) and recovered only slightly after sixteen months. These findings support the arguments of scholars who have long contended that divorce under current law spells economic hardship for most custodial parents and their minor children.

As Furstenberg and Cherlin show in their admirably balanced survey of current research, there are at least three sets of reasons for this outcome: Many women bargain away support payments in return for sole custody of their children or to eliminate the need to deal with their former spouses; when awarded, child support payments are on average pitifully inadequate; and many fathers cough up only a portion (at best) of their required payments. A Census Bureau report from the mid-1980s showed that of mothers with court-ordered support payments, only half received all of what they were owed, a quarter received partial payments, and the remaining quarter got nothing at all.

IF THE ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF FAMILY BREAKDOWN are clear, the psychological effects are just now coming into focus. As Karl Zinsmeister summarizes an emerging consensus, "There is a mountain of scientific evidence showing that when families disintegrate children often end up with intellectual, physical, and emotional scars that persist for life. . . . We talk about the drug crisis, the education crisis, and the problems of teen pregnancy and juvenile crime. But all these ills trace back predominantly to one source: broken families."

As more and more children are reared in one-parent families, it becomes clear that the economic consequences of a parent's absence (usually the father) may pale beside the psychological consequences—which include higher than average levels of youth suicide, low intellectual and educational performance, and higher than average rates of mental illness, violence, and drug use.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the long-standing and strong relationship between crime and one-parent families. In a recent study, Douglas Smith and G. Roger Jarjoura found that "neighborhoods with larger percentages of youth (those aged twelve to twenty) and areas with higher percentages of single-parent households also have higher rates of violent crime."² The relationship is so strong that

There is growing recognition that we must place the family at the center of our thinking about social issues.

controlling for family configuration erases the relationship between race and crime and between low income and crime. This conclusion shows up time and time again in the literature; poverty is far from the sole determinant of crime.

While the scarcity of intact families in the ghetto is largely a function of the failure of families to form in the first place, in the larger society the central problem is family disintegration, caused primarily by divorce. This pervasive phenomenon has effects that are independent of economics. It is to these studies that we now turn.

In 1981, John Guidubaldi, then president of the National Association of School Psychologists, picked a team of 144 psychologists in thirty-

eight states, who gathered long-term data on seven hundred children, half from intact families, the other half children of divorce. Preliminary results published in 1986 showed that the effects of divorce on children persisted over time and that the psychological consequences were significant even after correcting for income differences.³

The problems engendered by divorce extend well beyond vanishing role models. Children need authoritative rules and stable schedules, which harried single parents often have a hard time supplying. As Guidubaldi puts it, "One of the things we found is that children who had regular bedtimes, less TV, hobbies and after-school activities—children who are in households that are orderly and predictable—do better than children who [did] not. I don't think we can escape the conclusion that children need structure, and oftentimes the divorce household is a chaotic scene."

The results of the Guidubaldi study have been confirmed and deepened by Judith Wallerstein's ten-year study of sixty middle-class divorced families. Among her key findings:

- Divorce is almost always more devastating for children than for their parents.

- The effects of divorce are often long lasting. Children are especially affected because divorce occurs during their formative years. What they see and experience becomes a part of their inner world, their view of themselves, and their view of society.

- Almost half the children entered adulthood as worried, underachieving, self-deprecating, and sometimes angry young men and women.

- Adolescence is a period of grave risk for children in divorced families; those who entered adolescence in the immediate wake of their parents' di-

19

American Federation of Teachers: A QuEST Reader



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

voces had a particularly bad time. The young people told us time and again how much they needed a family structure, how much they wanted to be protected, and how much they yearned for clear guidelines for moral behavior.⁴

Furstenberg and Cherlin offer a nuanced, but ultimately troubling, account of the noneconomic consequences of divorce. For most children, it comes as an "unwelcome shock," even when the parents are openly quarreling. In the short term, boys seem to have a harder time coping than girls, in part because of an "escalating cycle of misbehavior and harsh response between mothers and sons." Girls more typically respond with internalized disruption rather than external behavior—with heightened levels of anxiety, withdrawal, and depression that may become apparent only years later. These differences reflect the fact that divorce almost always means disrupted relations with the father. It is difficult to overstate the extent of the disruption that typically occurs. Even in the period relatively soon after divorce, only one-sixth of all children will see their fathers as often as once a week, and close to one-half will not see them at all. After ten years, almost two-thirds will have no contact.

These findings are less than self-interpreting, Furstenberg and Cherlin point out, because they must be compared with the effects on children of intact but troubled families. On the one hand, various studies indicate that the children of divorce do no worse than children in families in which parents fight continually. On the other hand, a relatively small percentage of divorces result from, and terminate, such clearly pathological situations. There are many more cases in which there is little open conflict, but one or both partners feels unfulfilled, bored, or constrained. Indeed, the onset of divorce in these families can intensify conflict, particularly as experienced by children. As Nicholas Zill observes, "Divorces tend to generate their own problems."

Given the profound psychological effects of divorce, it is hardly surprising to discover what teachers and administrators have known for some time: One of the major reasons for America's declining educational achievement is the disintegrating American family. And if we continue to neglect the crisis of the American family, we will have undercut current efforts at educational reform.

Untangling just what it is about family structure that makes for high or low educational achievement is a difficult task. Clearly the economics of the family have a great deal to do with achievement; children from poor families consistently do less well than do children from non-poor or well-to-do families. Nevertheless, income is clearly not the whole story. When studies control for income, significant differences in educational achievement appear between

children from single-parent families and children from intact families.

For example, a study conducted under the auspices of the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the Institute for Development of Educational Activities shows that family background has an important effect on educational achievement above and beyond income level—especially for boys. Lower-income girls with two parents, for instance, score higher on achievement tests than do higher-income boys with one parent. At the very bottom of the achievement scale are lower-income boys with one parent.⁵

WHAT SHOULD BE OUR RESPONSE TO these developments? The recent literature suggests three broad possibilities. First, we may applaud, with Judith Stacey, the demise of the traditional (rigid, patriarchal) family and the rise of "postmodern" (flexible, variegated, female-centered) arrangements, which are allegedly far more consistent with egalitarian democracy. Second, we may accept Jan Dizard and Howard Gadlin's suggestion that moral change (in the direction of autonomy) and economic change (in the direction of a two-earner, postindustrial economy) have rendered obsolete the older model of the private family; in its place, they advocate a dramatically expanded public sphere on the Swedish model that assumes many of the private family's functions. And third, there is the response, neither postmodern nor socialist, that might be called neotraditional.

It goes something like this. A primary purpose of the family is to raise children well, and for this purpose stably married parents are best. Sharply rising rates of divorce, unwed mothers, and runaway fathers do not represent "alternative lifestyles." They are, instead, most truly characterized as patterns of adult behavior with profoundly negative consequences for children. Families have primary responsibility for instilling traits such as discipline, ambition, respect for the law, and regard for others; and it is a responsibility that cannot be discharged as effectively by auxiliary social institutions such as public schools. This responsibility entails a sphere of legitimate parental authority that should be bolstered—not undermined—by society. It requires personal sacrifice and the delay of certain forms of gratification on the part of parents. It means that government should devote substantial resources to stabilizing families and to enhancing their child-rearing capacity. But at the same time it must minimize bureaucratic cost, complexity, and intrusiveness, working instead to broaden family choice, opportunity, and responsibility.

The willingness to join the languages of economics and morals, and to consider new approaches to

21

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

old goals, is increasingly characteristic of public discussion of the family. As Barbara Whitehead notes, this approach suffuses the recent report of the National Commission on Children. The volume edited by David Blankenhorn, Steven Bayme, and Jean Bethke Elshtain is particularly strong along the moral dimension. To be sure, it is easy for this stance to give the appearance of ineffectual exhortation. The editors of *The New York Times* assert that the commission's final report "swims in platitudes." Still, there are eminently practical ways of embedding moral concerns in policies and institutions. Richard Louv argues for moral change focused on the community as much as the individual. He urges us to reweave the tattered "web" of social relationships—parent-school ties, neighborhoods, communal child care arrangements, and the like—that provide a supportive environment for families and help nurture children. Although Louv emphasizes the importance of civil society, he does not imagine that the web can be adequately repaired without major changes in public policy.

Here Louv joins an emerging consensus that differs over details but not over essentials. The point is not to be driven to make a false choice between moral and economic concerns, but rather to combine them in a relation of mutual support. It might well be argued, for example, that the government has a responsibility not to tax away the money that families need to raise children. Four decades ago, the United States had a disguised family allowance: In 1948 the personal exemption was \$600 (42 percent of per-capita personal income), while today's personal exemption is only 11 percent of per-capita income. This meant that a married couple at the median income with two minor dependents paid only 0.3 percent of their 1948 income in federal income taxes, compared to today's 9.1 percent. The 1948 couple's total tax bill (federal, state, and Social Security) was 2 percent of personal income. Today that total comes to about 30 percent.

Thus, one proposal now gaining support is to raise the personal exemption from the current \$2,050 to at least \$4,000, and perhaps eventually to \$7,500. To make this more affordable, the bulk of the increase could be targeted to young children, and the increase could be phased out for upper-income taxpayers. Another approach, endorsed by the National Com-

If the private and public sectors must assume greater responsibility for the well-being of families with children, so must parents.

mission on Children, would create a \$1,000 tax credit for each child; low-income families that owe no taxes would receive a cash payment for the amount of the credit. (To avoid potentially perverse incentives, this proposal should be coupled with a broader program of welfare reform.)

Reducing the tension between work and family will take changes in the private as well as the public sector. Hewlett, Louv, and many others argue for a "family-oriented workplace" with far more adaptable schedules: more flexible hours, greater opportunities for working at home and communicating by computer, for part-time employment, and for job sharing. Resistance to these changes reflects primarily the ignorance or the obduracy of middle-aged male managers, not negative impact on corporate balance sheets. Much the same is true of unpaid leave for parents following the birth of a child. Studies at the state level indicate that the costs and dis-

ruptive effects of such leaves, even when legally mandatory, are minimal.

Adequate reward for labor force participation represents another important link between morals and public policy. If we believe that the presence of a parent who works outside the home furnishes a crucial moral example for his or her children, then surely the community has a responsibility to ensure that full-time work by a parent provides a non-poverty family income. As Robert Shapiro of the Progressive Policy Institute has argued, the most efficient way to accomplish this goal would be to expand the Earned Income Tax Credit and tie it to family size.

This emphasis on the use of the tax code to promote family opportunity and responsibility is characteristic of a political outlook that has been called "neoprogressive." This is not to suggest that traditional liberal approaches are in every case misguided. Some of them—prenatal care, WIC (the nutrition program for poor women, infants, and children), childhood immunization, and Head Start—efficiently promote the well-being of children and families, and the political consensus supporting their expansion now stretches from KidsPac (a liberal, children-oriented political action committee) and the Children's Defense Fund to the Bush administration and the corporate-based Committee for Economic Development. And yet the neoprogressives are more willing than the traditional liberals to re-examine the

programs of the past and to distinguish between what works and what doesn't.

IF THE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SECTORS MUST ASSUME greater responsibility for the well-being of families with children, so must parents. In particular, the moral obligation to help support one's biological children persists regardless of one's legal relationship to them, and the law is fully justified in enforcing this obligation. The 1988 Family Support Act requires states to collect the Social Security numbers of both parents (married or unmarried) at birth, to increase efforts to establish contested paternity, to use (as at least rebuttable presumptions) their guidelines concerning appropriate levels of child support, and to move toward collecting all new support awards through automatic payroll deductions.

These are steps in the right direction, but they don't go far enough. Mary Ann Glendon has argued powerfully that a "children first" principle should govern our spousal support and marital property law:

The judges' main task would be to piece together, from property and income and inkind personal care, the best possible package to meet the needs of children and their physical guardian. Until the welfare of the children had been adequately secured in this way, there would be no question of, or debate about, "marital property." All assets, no matter when or how acquired, would be subject to the duty to provide for the children.⁶

Moreover, the state-level reforms mentioned above do nothing to address what is in many cases the chief impediment to support collection: fathers moving from state to state to slow or avoid apprehension. Conflicting state laws and a morass of administrative complexity discourage mothers from pursuing their claims across jurisdictions. Ellwood and others have called for the federalization of the system, with payroll deductions remitted to, and support payments drawn from, a centralized national fund. The U.S. Commission on Interstate Child Support, created by Congress to develop a blueprint for reform, is considering this idea.

Even when child support is collected regularly from absent parents who can afford to provide it, payments are typically set too low to avoid tremendous disruption in the lives of custodial mothers and their children. Writing from very different perspectives, Lenore Weitzman, Martha Albertson Fineman, and Furstenberg and Cherlin converge on the conclusion that the laws and the practices of many states leave men in a far more favorable situation after divorce. Furstenberg and Cherlin cite approvingly a proposal to require noncustodial fathers to pay a fixed proportion of their income, 17 percent to

34 percent, depending on the number of minor children; the adoption of this standard nationwide would raise total child support due by roughly two-thirds. Fineman advocates a need-based approach that would (she argues) yield better results for women and children than would ostensibly egalitarian standards.

During the past generation, the presumption in favor of awarding mothers custody of their children has been replaced in many cases by the presumption of equal claims. This development has generated a rising number of joint custody arrangements that do not, on average, work out very well. It has also worsened the post-divorce economic status of custodial mothers and their children: Because women tend to view custody as a paramount issue, they often compromise on economic matters to avoid the custody battle made possible by the new, supposedly more egalitarian, legal framework. And here, too, scholars from various points on the ideological spectrum are converging on the conclusion that the traditional arrangement had much to recommend it. They propose a "primary caretaker" standard: judges should be instructed to award custody of young children to the parent who has (in the words of a leading advocate) "performed a substantial majority of the [direct] caregiving tasks for the child."

THESE AND SIMILAR PROPOSALS WILL HELP custodial mothers and their children pick up the pieces after divorce, but they will do little to reduce the incidence of divorce. For Furstenberg and Cherlin, this is all that can be done: "We are inclined to accept the irreversibility of high levels of divorce as our starting point for thinking about changes in public policy." Hewlett is more disposed to grasp the nettle. While rejecting a return to the fault-based system of the past, she believes that the current system makes divorce too easy and too automatic. Government should send a clearer moral signal that families with children are worth preserving. In this spirit, she suggests that parents of minor children seeking divorce undergo an eighteen-month waiting period, during which they would be obliged to seek counseling and to reach a binding agreement that truly safeguards their children's future.

The generation that installed the extremes of self-expression and self-indulgence at the heart of American culture must now learn some hard old lessons about commitment, self-sacrifice, the deferral of gratification, and simple endurance. It will not be easy. But other sorts of gratifications may be their reward. Perhaps the old morality was not wrong to suggest that a deeper kind of satisfaction awaits those who accept and fulfill their essential human responsibilities.

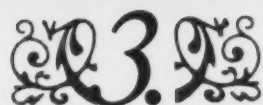
23

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*





BEST COPY AVAILABLE



The Other Crisis in American Education

By Daniel J. Singal

TWO CRISES ARE STALKING AMERICAN education. Each poses a major threat to the nation's future. The two are very different in character and will require separate strategies if we wish to solve them; yet to date, almost without exception, those concerned with restoring excellence to our schools have lumped them together.

The first crisis, which centers on disadvantaged minority children attending inner-city schools, has received considerable attention, as well it should. Put simply, it involves students whose habitat makes it very difficult for them to learn. The key issues are more social than educational. These children clearly need dedicated teachers and a sound curriculum, the two staples of a quality school, but the fact remains that most of them will not make significant progress until they also have decent housing, a better diet, and a safer environment in which to live.

The second crisis, in contrast, is far more academic than social and to a surprising extent invisible. It involves approximately half the country's

student population—the group that educators refer to as “college-bound.” Although the overwhelming majority of these students attend suburban schools, a fair number can be found in big-city or consolidated rural districts, or in independent or parochial schools. Beginning in the mid-1970s these students have been entering college so badly prepared that they have performed far below potential, often to the point of functional disability. We tend to assume that with their high aptitude for learning, they should be able to fend for themselves. However, the experience of the past fifteen years has proved decisively that they can't.

For most people, any mention of the problems of American education almost immediately conjures up an image of the wretched conditions in the stereotypical urban ghetto school. But can we really explain the sharp decline in college-entrance-exam scores by pointing to the inner cities, where only a tiny fraction of students even take the Scholastic Aptitude Test, or SAT? Do so many freshmen entering prestigious institutions like Harvard and Berkeley display a limited mastery of basic historical facts, not to mention of their own language, because they come from crime-ridden neighborhoods or school districts with no tax base?

If one looks at the aggregate statistics of

25

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

Daniel J. Singal is professor of history at Hobart and William Smith Colleges. This article originally appeared in the November 1991 issue of The Atlantic and is reprinted with the permission of the author.

American education from this perspective, the full dimensions of this other crisis become strikingly apparent. Consider the recent history of the Stanford Achievement Test, which has long served as one of the main instruments for measuring pupil progress in our schools. According to Herbert Rudman, a professor of educational psychology at Michigan State University and a co-author of the test for more than three decades, from the 1920s to the late 1960s American children taking the Stanford made significant gains in their test performance. They made so much progress, in fact, that as the test was revised each decade, the level of difficulty of the questions was increased substantially, reflecting the increasing level of challenge of the instructional materials being used in the schools.

From the late 1960s to the early 1980s, however, we managed to squander the better part of that progress, with the greatest losses coming in the high schools. During the past few years the Stanford and other tests results have shown some improvement in math and science, and in language skills at the elementary school level. But there has been little or no movement in the verbal areas among junior high and high school students, and seasoned test interpreters have also seen a tendency for the gains made in the early years of school to wash out as the child becomes older. In effect, the test numbers substantiate what the National Commission on Excellence in Education concluded—quoting the education analyst Paul Copperman—in 1983 in *A Nation at Risk*: “Each generation of Americans has outstripped its parents in education, in literacy, and in economic attainment. For the first time in the history of our country, the educational skills of one generation will not surpass, will not equal, will not even approach, those of their parents.”

The blame for this wholesale decline in test scores is often put on a throng of underachieving minority students thought to have been pulling down national test averages, but in fact just the opposite is true. To be sure, it is possible to attribute much of the relatively small initial drop in SAT scores, from 1963 to 1970, to the fact that blacks and other minorities began taking the test in larger numbers during those years, but since then the composition of the test population has not changed in any way that would dramatically

Our brightest youngsters have suffered the most dramatic setbacks over the past two decades.

affect test scores. Most important, blacks have made gradual but significant gains in the past two decades, as measured by school achievement tests like the Stanford and by college-entrance exams. Although their average scores still fall substantially below those of whites, their combined (verbal and math) SAT scores rose by 49 points during the 1980s alone.

“Perhaps the most untold story of American education in the past few years is the achievement of black students,” Gregory R. Anrig, the president of the Educational Testing Service, declares. “The hard data are encouraging.” The sad irony, of course, is that this progress came at a time when the Reagan administration was proposing drastic cuts in the amount of federal

scholarship aid available to students from low-income families, most likely leading many young blacks to believe that a college education was not within their reach.

While students in the bottom quartile have shown slow but steady improvement since the 1960s, average test scores have nonetheless gone down, primarily because of the performance of those in the top quartile. This “highest cohort of achievers,” Rudman writes, has shown “the greatest declines across a variety of subjects as well as across age-level groups.” Analysts have also found “a substantial drop among those children in the middle range of achievement,” he continues, “but less loss and some modest gains at the lower levels.” In other words, our brightest youngsters, those most likely to be headed for selective colleges, have suffered the most dramatic setbacks over the past two decades—a fact with grave implications for our ability to compete with other nations in the future. If this is true—and abundant evidence exists to suggest that it is—then we indeed have a second major crisis in our education system.

LOOK AT WHAT HAS HAPPENED ON THE SAT, a test that retains its well-deserved status as the most important educational measuring device in America. Despite the test’s many critics, the number of colleges relying on the SAT keeps increasing, because it provides such an accurate gauge of the basic skills needed for college-level work, among them reading comprehension, vocabulary,

and the ability to reason with mathematical concepts. The SAT also has the virtue of having a rock-steady scoring system: it is calibrated, by the College Board, so that a score earned in 1991 will represent almost exactly the same level of performance as it did in, say, 1961. Thus, by tracking the percentage of students coming in above the benchmark of 600 on the College Board scale (which runs from 200 to 800), one can get a good sense of how the country's most capable students have fared over the years.

The news is not encouraging. In 1972, of the high school seniors taking the SAT 11.4 percent had verbal scores over 600; by 1983 the number had dropped to 6.9 percent, and, despite modest gains in the mid-1980s, it remains in that disheartening vicinity. That's a decline of nearly 40 percent. The decline since the mid-1960s has probably been closer to 50 percent, but unfortunately the College Board changed its reporting system in 1972, and earlier data isn't available. The math SAT presents a somewhat different story. Though the percentage scoring over 600 dropped from 17.9 in 1972 to 14.4 by 1981, it has climbed back up to 17.9 in 1991. However, an influx of high-scoring Asian-American students (who now make up 8 percent of those taking the test, as compared with 2 percent in 1972) has apparently had much to do with this recent upsurge.

To grasp what these national figures really mean, it helps to approach them from the standpoint of the individual student. How, we should ask, would the drop in SAT scores affect a typical top-quartile senior at a well-regarded suburban high school in 1991? To my knowledge, no published studies have addressed this question, but the available information, including my own research, suggests that our hypothetical senior would come in roughly fifty to sixty points lower on the verbal section and twenty-five points lower on the math than he or she would have in 1970.

Consider the trend in average freshman scores at selective colleges. Indeed, perusing a twenty-year-old edition of *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges* is an experience equivalent to entering a different world, with tuitions much lower and SAT scores much higher than at most schools today. In 1970 students arriving at top-ranked institutions like Columbia College, Swarthmore College, the University of Chicago, and Pomona College posted average verbal SATs from 670 to 695; by the mid-1980s the scores ranged from 620 to 640, and they have stayed roughly in that neighborhood ever since. The same pattern appears at colleges a notch or two lower in the academic hierarchy. To take a few examples from different geographic areas, from 1970 to 1987

average verbal scores went from 644 to 570 at Hamilton College, from 607 to 563 at Washington University, from 600 to 560 at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, and from 560 to 499 at the University of California at Santa Barbara.

The point is *not* that these particular schools have slipped in their relative standings. They all currently receive ratings the same as or higher than those they received twenty years ago from *Barron's* in terms of competition for admission. One could pick almost any selective institution at random and find the same trend (an exception: the stronger schools in the South, where test scores held steady or rose in the wake of desegregation). Nor can one attribute the drop in scores to a change in the size of the test population or in the percentage of high school seniors taking the SAT (the latter figure has risen significantly only in the past few years, too recently to have affected the 1987 scores). To be sure, an increase in the number of minority students attending these institutions has been a factor, but the basic problem remains: with a 40 percent decline in the proportion of students scoring over 600, there are far fewer high-scoring students to go around.

But do these numbers matter? Does a loss of sixty points on the verbal SAT translate into a significant difference in a student's educational experience at college? The testimony of those who teach at the college level suggests that the answer is yes. When a national poll in 1989 asked professors whether they thought undergraduates were "seriously underprepared in basic skills," 75 percent said yes and only 15 percent said no. The same poll asked whether institutions of higher learning were spending "too much time and money teaching students what they should have learned in high school." Sixty-eight percent said yes. Professors feel like this, I should add, not because they are old scolds given to grouching about students but because their work brings them into daily contact with the manifold ways in which the American education system has failed these young people.

Those who tend to dismiss those sixty lost SAT points as insignificant haven't seen a college term paper lately. It's not that freshmen in 1991 are unable to read or write. Most of them possess what the National Assessment of Educational Progress calls "satisfactory" skills in this area. But is that enough for college? Do they have sufficient command of the English language to comprehend a college-level text, think through a complex issue, or express a reasonably sophisticated argument on paper? Those of us who were teaching in the early 1970s can attest that the overwhelming majority

27

American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader

of freshmen at the more selective colleges arrived with such "advanced" skills. Now only a handful come so equipped.

TAKE READING, FOR EXAMPLE. "While the nation's students have the skills to derive a surface understanding of what they read," the NAEP recently reported, "they have difficulty when asked to defend or elaborate upon this surface understanding." That's what most college faculty would say. Emilia da Costa, a Latin America specialist who has taught at Yale for the past eighteen years, estimates that whereas 70 percent of her students can pick out the general theme of an essay or a book, only 25 percent come away with in-depth comprehension of what they read. David Samson, a former lecturer in history and literature at Harvard, likewise observes, "No one reads for nuance. They pay no attention to detail." My own experience confirms this. Countless times I have been amazed at how little students have managed to glean from a book I know they have read, to the point where they are often unable to recall the names of prominently mentioned figures. So much escapes them; even those of above-average ability absorb no more than a dusting of detail from a printed text. And without such detailed information it's impossible for them to gain a real understanding of what the author is saying.

Equally distressing is the rate at which today's students read. A friend of mine at the University of Michigan remembers that in the 1960s the normal assignment in his courses was one book a week. Now he allows two to three weeks for each title. He has also reluctantly had to adjust the level of difficulty of his assignments: even a journalist like Walter Lippmann is too hard for most freshmen and sophomores these days, he finds. Again, this is typical. Twelve to fifteen books over a fifteen-week semester used to be the rule of thumb at selective colleges. Today it is six to eight books, and they had better be short texts, written in relatively simple English.

As one might expect, students who don't read at an advanced level can't write well either. Their knowledge of grammar is not bad, according to Richard Marius, the director of the expository writing program at Harvard, but "the number of words available to express their thoughts is very, very limited, and the forms by which they express

Even a journalist like Walter Lippmann is too hard for most freshmen and sophomores these days.

themselves are also very limited." The average incoming Harvard student, he observes, has a "utilitarian command of language" resulting in sentences that follow a simple subject-predicate, subject-predicate format with little variation or richness of verbal expression. Harvard, of course, gets the cream of the crop. Those of us teaching at lesser institutions would be happy with utilitarian but serviceable prose from our freshmen. More often we get mangled sentences, essays composed without the slightest sense of paragraphing, and writing that can't sustain a thought for more than half a page.

Along with this impoverishment of language comes a downturn in reasoning skills. Da Costa laments that students are no longer trained in logical analysis, and consequently have difficulty using evidence to reach a conclusion. R. Jackson Wilson finds this to be the greatest change he has observed during a quarter century of teaching history at Smith College. "Students come to us having sat around for twelve years expressing attitudes toward things rather than analyzing," he says. "They are always ready to tell you how they feel about an issue, but they have never learned how to construct a rational argument to defend their opinions." Again, these complaints are amply substantiated by data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress. On one test of analytic writing measuring "the ability to provide evidence, reason logically, and make a well-developed point," only *four-tenths of one percent* of eleventh graders performed at the "elaborated" (what I believe should be considered college-freshman) level.

Finally, no account of the present condition of college students would be complete without mention of the extraordinary dearth of factual knowledge they bring to college. Horror stories on this topic abound—and they are probably all true. I will never forget two unusually capable juniors, one of whom was a star political science major, who came to my office a few years ago to ask what was this thing called the New Deal. I had made reference to it during a lecture on the assumption that everyone in the class would be well acquainted with Franklin Roosevelt's domestic program, but I was wrong; the two students had checked with their friends, and none of them had heard of the New Deal either. Another junior recently asked me to help him pick a twentieth-century

28

*The Task
Before Us:
A QuEST
Reader*

American novelist on whom to write a term paper. He had heard vaguely of F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway, but did not recognize the names of Sinclair Lewis, John Dos Passos, Norman Mailer, William Styron, and Saul Bellow.

Indeed, one can't assume that college students know anything anymore. Paula Fass, a professor of history at the University of California at Berkeley, remains astonished that sophomores and juniors in her upper-level course on American social history are often unable to differentiate between the American Revolution and the Civil War, but rather see them as two big events that happened way back in the past. Alan Heimert, a veteran member of the Harvard English department, encounters the same mushy grasp on historical knowledge and blames it on the "trendy social-studies curriculum" now taught in most high schools which covers broad thematic topics rather than history. "They are aware that someone oppressed someone else," he says with only slight exaggeration, "but they aren't sure exactly what took place and they have no idea of the order in which it happened."

Though not always recognized, a direct connection exists between this deficit in factual knowledge and the decline in verbal skills. Most reading, after all, is at bottom a form of information processing in which the mind selects what it wants to know from the printed page and files it away for future use. In conducting that operation of selecting, interpreting, and storing information, the reader constantly relies on his or her previous stock of knowledge as a vital frame of reference. No matter how fascinating or valuable a new detail might be, a person finds it almost impossible to hold in memory and have available for retrieval unless it can be placed in some kind of larger context. Providing that basic intellectual scaffolding used to be a major function of a good high school education. Year-long survey courses in history and literature, covering the United States, Europe, and the world, were designed to ensure that college-bound students would have the necessary background to make sense of the new subject matter they would encounter in college. Yet few high schools today teach that kind of curriculum.

Little wonder that so many students experience great difficulty in absorbing detail; since they have no context in which to fit what they read, it quickly flows out of their minds. Unable to retain much, they find little profit in reading, which leads them to read less, which in turn makes it harder for them to improve their reading skills.

One often hears this generation accused of laziness. They don't perform well in school or college or later on the job, it is said, because they lack

motivation. I don't happen to subscribe to that theory. The percentage of students who are truly lazy—that is, who simply have an aversion to work—is probably no greater today than it has been in the past. The real problem, I'm convinced, is that college-bound youngsters over the past two decades have not received the quality education they deserve. As R. Jackson Wilson observes of his students at Smith, this generation is typically "good-spirited, refreshingly uncowed by teachers' authority, and very willing to work." They enter college with high ambitions, only to find those ambitions dashed in many cases by inadequate skills and knowledge. The normal activities required to earn a bachelor's degree—reading, writing, researching, and reasoning—are so difficult for them that a large number (I would guess a majority at most schools) simply give up in frustration. Some actually leave; the rest go through the motions, learning and contributing little, until it's time to pick up their diplomas. We rightly worry about the nation's high school dropouts. Perhaps we should worry as well about these silent college "dropouts."

WHAT HAS CAUSED THIS GREAT DECLINE in our schools? The multitude of reports that now fill the library shelves tend to designate "social factors" as the prime culprit. Television usually heads the list, followed by rock music, the influence of adolescent peer groups, the increase in both single-parent families and households where both parents work, and even faulty nutrition.

Those who attribute the loss of academic performance to social factors don't take account of the small number of high schools around the country that have managed to escape the downturn. Some are posh private academies; a few are located in blue-collar neighborhoods. What they have in common is a pattern of stable or even rising test scores at a time when virtually all the schools around them experienced sharp declines. There is no indication that the children attending these exceptional schools watched significantly fewer hours of television, listened to less heavy-metal music, were less likely to have working mothers, or ate fewer Big Macs than other children. Rather, they appear to have had the good fortune to go to schools that were intent on steering a steady course in a time of rapid change, thus countering the potentially negative impact of various social factors.

It would seem obvious good sense to look closely at this select group of schools to determine what they have been doing right, but as far as I can determine this has been done in only two national studies. The better one was issued by the

29

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) in 1978, under the somewhat pedestrian title *Guidelines for Improving SAT Scores*. Now out of print and hard to find, it contains one of the most perceptive diagnoses available of the underlying malady in our schools.

The report identifies one main characteristic that successful schools have shared—the belief that academics must invariably receive priority over every other activity. “The difference comes,” we are told, “from a singular commitment to academic achievement for the college-bound student.” These schools did not ignore the other dimensions of student life. By and large, the NASSP found, schools that maintained excellence in academics sought to be excellent in everything else they did; they “proved to be apt jugglers, keeping all important balls in the air.” But academic work came first.

Two other factors help account for the prowess of these schools in holding the line against deterioration. The first is a dogged reliance on a traditional liberal-arts curriculum. In an era of mini-courses and electives, the tiny group of high schools that kept test scores and achievement high continued to require year-long courses in literature and to encourage enrollment in rigorous math classes, including geometry and advanced algebra. Though the learning environment in those schools was often “broad and imaginative,” in the words of the NASSP, fundamentals such as English grammar and vocabulary received heavy stress. The other key factor in preserving academic quality was the practice of grouping students by ability in as many subjects as possible. The contrast was stark: schools that had “severely declining test scores” had “moved determinedly toward heterogeneous grouping” (that is, mixed students of differing ability levels in the same classes), while the “schools who have maintained good SAT scores” tended “to prefer homogeneous grouping.”

If attaining educational excellence is this simple, why have these high-quality schools become so rare? The answer lies in the cultural ferment of the 1960s.

IN EVERY CONCEIVABLE FASHION THE REIGNING ethos of those times was hostile to excellence in education. Individual achievement fell under intense suspicion, as did attempts to maintain stan-

The typical college-bound high school student reads only sixty-five pages a week, or less than ten pages a night.

dards. Discriminating among students on the basis of ability or performance was branded “elitist.” Educational gurus of the day called for essentially nonacademic schools, whose main purpose would be to build habits of social cooperation and equality rather than to train the mind. A good education, it was said, maximized the child’s innate spontaneity, creativity, and affection for others. To the extent that logic and acquired knowledge interfered with that process, they were devalued.

This populist tidal wave receded by the late 1970s, but the mediocrity it left in its wake remains. The extent of the devastation has varied by subject area: math and the natural sciences, which continue to be blessed with relatively widespread agreement on what should be taught, have escaped the worst damage (though test scores in

these areas still fall below average in comparisons with scores in other industrialized nations), while English and history now lie in ruins in all too many schools. The latter, of course, are the disciplines primarily responsible for inculcating verbal skills and for supplying the broad framework of knowledge that students need for success in college. Yet it is precisely in these areas that the spirit of the sixties remains most evident, hovering over the high schools and junior highs like a ghost.

Consider the teaching of English. The Great Books, of course, are out of fashion. A few get assigned as a token gesture, but are rarely set in chronological order. The results of a questionnaire I recently distributed at Hobart and William Smith Colleges suggest that less than a quarter of the college-bound population now gets a real year-long survey of American literature, with probably no more than 15 percent taking such a course in British or European literature. Instead, students all too often are given works that, as the English department at one highly ranked independent school puts it, are “age-appropriate” and “reflect [a] concern for social pluralism.” “Age-appropriate” means giving students assignments “that reflect their interests as adolescents, that they can read without constant recourse to a dictionary, and from which they can take whatever they are inspired to take.”

Nor are they asked to read much. Most ninth- and tenth-grade English reading lists are limited to four or five titles a year. According to Arthur N. Applebee, the director of the National Research



Center on Literature Teaching and Learning, the typical college-bound high school student reads only sixty-five pages a week (even with Advanced Placement courses factored in), or less than ten pages a night. A check of the typical high school curriculum would disclose that plays are favorite choices these days (they tend to be much shorter than novels and make easier reading), along with personal memoirs. The rich diet of fiction and poetry that used to be served up—Dickens, Twain, Poe, Hawthorne, Shakespeare, Chaucer, Thoreau, Dickinson, Milton, Melville, and Steinbeck—is increasingly hard to find.

These changes in the teaching of literature matter greatly because reading is the primary vehicle by which students absorb the rhythms and patterns of language. The more a person encounters sophisticated prose, the more he or she will pick up varied sentence structure, vocabulary in context, and even spelling, as well as advanced descriptive techniques and narrative strategies. Feed a student the literary equivalent of junk food and you will get an impoverished command of English, which is what we too often see in the current crop of college freshmen. And yet, because most new teachers these days are themselves the product of this new English curriculum, the trend continues to run the wrong way.

The rest of the English curriculum also reflects the impact of the sixties. If the reports I get from my students are accurate, it would appear that formal drills on grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and diction are infrequent these days. Teachers may toss an occasional drill into the schedule to keep parents satisfied, but the assumption is that students will absorb these things automatically from their reading. Given what students currently read, however, that's a dubious assumption. As for writing, when it is assigned (there seems to be wide variation among schools on this), it tends to take the form of "personal expression"—with assignments calling for first-person narratives that describe what the student has seen, felt, or experienced. Essays in which the writer marshals evidence to support a coherent, logical argument are all too rare. Since that kind of exercise might dampen creativity, it must be minimized. The outcome is utterly predictable. "Analytic writing was difficult for students in all grades," the National Assessment of Educational Progress noted in summarizing the results of its various writing tests in 1984, while students "had less difficulty with tasks requiring short responses based on personal experience."

In sum, this is a generation whose members may be better equipped to track the progress of their souls in diaries than any group of Americans

31

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

since the Puritans. But as for writing papers in college, or later producing the sorts of documents that get the world's work done, that's another story. In contrast, a survey conducted by the Educational Testing Service in the mid-1960s, just before countercultural innovations swept away the old curriculum, discovered that over twice as many high school students of that era said that they "frequently" wrote papers criticizing the literary works they were studying (a valuable pedagogic strategy because it forces the student to become a much closer reader) as said that they "frequently" wrote papers based on personal experience.

THE SAME TENDENCY APPEARS IN other key subjects. Students headed for college used to get a solid grasp of both American and European history at the high school level. Now, as most people are aware, they pass through an array of social studies courses designed to impress upon them the central values of the sixties, including concern for the natural environment, respect for people of different racial and ethnic groups, and women's rights. These values are important and should certainly be included in the curriculum. But teaching them in such a superficial manner, devoid of any historical context, simply doesn't work—as the alarming increase in racist and sexist incidents that has plagued college campuses in the past few years would suggest. Above all, this spotty social studies approach deprives students of that vital base of in-depth knowledge they must have to succeed as undergraduates.

Accompanying this pervasive dumbing-down of the curriculum has been a wholesale change in school philosophy. In place of "stretching" students, the key objective in previous eras, the goal has become not to "stress" them. One hears again and again that kids growing up "need time to smell the roses." (That they are more likely to spend their free hours in front of a television or cruising a shopping mall seems never to be considered.) Placing serious academic demands on them, it is thought, might impede their natural development and perhaps even render them neurotic. But the stress they avoid in high school often comes back to haunt them in college. An extensive survey of college freshmen recently found that an increasing number say they are "overwhelmed by all I have to do." "We have very high suicide rates among college students now," the survey's director, Alexander Astin, says. This should come as no surprise: having had little previous experience with stress, students are not well equipped to face the normal and necessary pressures of either college or the "real world."

Perhaps most crucial, the sixties mentality, with

its strong animus against what it defines as "elitism," has shifted the locus of concern in American education from high to low achievers. All over the country, educators today typically judge themselves by how well they can reach the least able student in the system, the slowest one in the class. Programs to help the culturally disadvantaged and the learning disabled have proliferated, while those for the gifted receive no more than token interest.

The prevailing ideology holds that it is much better to give up the prospect of excellence than to take the chance of injuring any student's self-esteem. Instead of trying to spur children on to set high standards for themselves, teachers invest their energies in making sure that slow learners do not come to think of themselves as failures. These attitudes have become so ingrained that in conversations with teachers and administrators one often senses a virtual prejudice against bright students. There is at times an underlying feeling, never articulated, that such children start off with too many advantages, and that it would be just as well to hold them back until their less fortunate contemporaries catch up with them. At a minimum, the assumption goes, students of above average ability will in due course find their way to classy colleges and thus don't need any special consideration from their schools.

In adopting this posture, one must remember, the education profession has simply been carrying out its social mandate. In the wake of the sixties the country seemed to be telling the schools that the prime mission now was to produce equality rather than excellence—to lift up those on the bottom, whether they were there because of race, class, ethnicity, or low ability. As the test scores tell us, the education establishment took this mission to heart. Those in the bottom quartile have shown slow but steady progress, while those in the top quartile have exhibited a sharp decline. Only since the appearance of *A Nation at Risk*, in 1983, with its warning about "a rising tide of mediocrity" sweeping over the schools, have we started to realize the sizable hidden cost that this current educational strategy has exacted.

Here it is necessary to be precise: the problem is not the pursuit of equality as such but the bias against excellence that has accompanied it. If anything, the effort to help children who start off life severely handicapped by their socioeconomic circumstances deserves more money and attention than it has received to date. However, that effort need not and must not obscure from view the quite separate problem of restoring academic quality to our schools. If real change is to occur in this regard, we must make clear to teachers and

32

*The Task
Before Us:
A QuEST
Reader*

administrators that their mandate has been revised—that we want to move toward social equality and academic excellence.

MOST OF THE REFORM proposals currently on the table fail to speak to the other crisis in American education. The majority are designed to raise minimum standards or to cut the high school dropout rate. To the extent that higher-level academics gets mentioned, the discussion usually centers on such topics as critical-thinking and “process writing” skills and cooperative learning groups, as if a few minor adjustments in technique could make a significant difference. Almost no one addresses the fundamental, substantive issues that must be dealt with if we really want to restore excellence to our schools.

If that is our objective—if we are determined to recover the ground we have lost since 1970—then we should take the following concrete steps:

1) *Dramatically increase the quality and quantity of assigned reading for students at all grade levels.* By the senior year of high school, college-bound students should be reading the equivalent of at least twelve books a year *for class*, not counting textbooks, along with six to eight additional books under the rubrics of independent and summer reading. To build up to this amount, the reading load should be adjusted in each of the preceding grades so that students become gradually accustomed to reading more each year. (A good rule of thumb might be to have college-bound students read the same number of books each year as their grade number—eight books in the eighth grade, nine books in the ninth, and so on.) Since reading is a learned skill that can almost invariably be improved by practice, the sheer number of pages counts—the more the better. But there should also be an effort to make the assigned texts as complex and challenging as possible. In the end, nothing builds a true command of language faster than this kind of regimen.

I can already hear a chorus of educators declaring this proposal to be utterly unworkable. “Kids just don’t read anymore,” they will say. But the fact is that this sort of reading load, which was standard in the best American schools a quarter century ago, is still standard in some schools today. At McDonogh, an independent school just outside Baltimore that enrolls college-bound students

Students are not well equipped to face the normal and necessary pressures of either college or the “real world.”

from a wide range of ability levels, fifteen to twenty assigned books a year in English class is not unusual for eleventh and twelfth graders. College admissions officers I know rave about how well prepared McDonogh graduates are and how enthusiastic about learning. The secret, I’m convinced, is in the reading. I see no reason why other schools can’t follow McDonogh’s example.

2) *Bring back required survey courses as the staple of the high school humanities curriculum.* There are many different ways to do this. My preference would be to have one year of coordinated courses in history and English focused on the United States, another year focused on Europe, and a third year devoted to the non-European world. Issues of race and gender would naturally arise; it is hard,

for instance, to cover American literature without including black and women writers, or to discuss our past without spending considerable time on slavery and segregation. But the main purpose of this curriculum would be to ensure that students enter college with a firm knowledge of how the world they will inherit has developed.

3) *Institute a flexible program of ability grouping at both the elementary and secondary school levels.* Few issues in education can raise tempers faster than ability grouping, and few are more badly misunderstood. The most common error is to confuse ability grouping with “tracking,” a practice in which students are sorted out at an early age according to their scores on intelligence tests and placed in separate “tracks” for fast, medium, and slow learners, where they remain through high school. Reformers in the 1960s rightly objected to that kind of predestination, pointing out that minority and working-class children were often routinely put in the slow track and thus deprived of the chance to advance themselves through schooling. But unfortunately this assault on tracking soon broadened to include ability grouping, a somewhat murky term that I would contend should be defined as a system for dividing students up on the basis of their actual performance in individual subjects. Under ability grouping a student might start off in the fast group in math but the slow one in English, with the placements changing from year to year depending on his or her progress. The guiding principle is not to give privileged treatment to any one group but rather

33

American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader

to provide instruction closely tailored to the learning needs of each child.

Does ability grouping work? The research can supply whatever verdict one favors. Until roughly the mid-1960s most of the studies tended to show that ability grouping was beneficial. Then came the cultural revolution of the late 1960s. For the next two decades researchers found that ability grouping was damaging to most students, especially those at the bottom. The pendulum now seems to be swinging back the other way, with a number of recent investigators suggesting that such grouping does not harm anyone and can be of great value to those of above-average ability, provided they get a special curriculum that is truly challenging rather than simply moving through the standard curriculum at a faster pace. Moreover, these newer studies suggest that ability grouping may actually enhance the achievement of slower learners if they, too, are given a curriculum and teaching style specially designed for them. A unique program at South Mecklenburg High School, in Charlotte, North Carolina, has even found that ability grouping can significantly help those in the middle ability range, though once again the crucial element is instruction tailored to their needs.

Since the research is contradictory, perhaps the best way to decide the issue is to apply common sense. It is obvious that with children of different ability levels in the same classroom, everything will tend toward a level just a notch above the lowest common denominator. Instead of being challenged to develop their talents to the fullest, the most capable students will be forced to work, in effect, at half speed. The math problems set before them will require little effort on their part to solve; the English texts will not stretch them in the least. As a result, these students quickly discover that there is no reason for them ever to extend themselves, that they can coast through school with minimal effort.

Ability grouping continues to face formidable political opposition; last year, regrettably, the education task force of the National Governors' Association took its first major step by denouncing it (though its statement was so brief that one has difficulty telling whether it opposes ability grouping or tracking). Thus compromises may be

Is it right or sensible to place our children at such a strong disadvantage before they even begin their adult lives?

in order. One possibility is the system of intensive courses adopted by the Waynflete School, in Portland, Maine. An intensive section in English entails a heavier than normal load of reading in more-advanced texts, more-sophisticated writing assignments, and faster-paced instruction. The key is that all students are free to try an intensive section; there is no teacher placement involved. Those doing so run little risk: since the curriculum includes the same core material covered in a regular section, students unable to handle the demands can drop back at any time during the school year.

This arrangement has several advantages. One is that the "regular" sections are truly regular, rather than "slow" or "remedial," so that those enrolled in them feel no stigma whatsoever. Better yet, students who voluntarily contract

to be in a special section are especially motivated. Administrators at Waynflete report being pleasantly surprised at the number of kids with middle-range academic ability who perform well in intensive sections because they enjoy the challenge. And of course, this is a reform that can be implemented with relatively little disruption to other programs and at virtually no extra expense. It seems clear that more schools should be trying this system, yet to date, so far as I can tell, it remains unique to Waynflete.

4) *Attract more bright college graduates into the teaching profession.* It is astonishing, but all too true, that the average verbal SAT score of the young people drawn into teaching has hovered around 400 for more than a decade. "Half of the newly employed mathematics, science, and English teachers are not qualified to teach these subjects," bemoaned *A Nation at Risk*. Clearly, if we want top-notch instruction for college-bound students in the years ahead, we must find a new supply of capable teachers.

Why not set up a parallel system to the current teacher education system to provide an alternate career path for new teachers? Liberal-arts college graduates choosing the new path would go straight to the classroom and be exempt from all formal professional training. They would, however, have more experienced teachers in their schools serving as their mentors. Attracting these people into the profession would necessitate a much

34

*The Task
Before Us:
A QuEST
Reader*

higher pay scale but also something more. When I recently asked a group of exceptionally capable students at my college if they would consider a teaching career along these lines, three-quarters at first said yes, but soon reversed themselves. They had witnessed the demeaning conditions under which most teachers work, they explained, and wouldn't want the job even if salaries were more appealing. The only way to lure them into the classroom, it became clear, would be to give them considerable freedom to shape their own curricula, allow them to choose instructional materials, and spare them the petty annoyances like the ubiquitous loudspeaker announcements that can suddenly disrupt a class. If the governors really want to do something useful to upgrade education, establishing this alternative career path is perhaps the most valuable project they could take up.

THE OTHER CRISIS IN AMERICAN EDUCATION has ominous implications for the well-being of our political system. According to a recent study by the Times Mirror Center for the People and the Press, titled "The Age of Indifference," young Americans aged eighteen to twenty-nine are remarkably uninformed. They do read, the survey found, but primarily lightweight publications like *People* rather than serious newspapers or periodicals. Most striking, a majority of these young adults report that they often first become aware of political candidates from television commercials. This response cuts across all educational levels: college

graduates and high school dropouts alike displayed a troubling ignorance of political facts and a reliance on sound bites as their basic source of political knowledge. The "limited appetites and aptitudes" of this generation, the Times Mirror Center concluded, are already adversely affecting "the practice of politics and the nature of our democracy."

One could advance a host of reasons—economic, social, and cultural—why this other crisis in education needs immediate attention. But in the end the most important is probably moral, having to do with the responsibility of each generation to look after the well-being of its children. Observing the performance of students who have been arriving at college campuses over the past decade, one can only conclude that the present generation of American parents has been failing in its obligation to provide its offspring with a high-quality education. It seems safe to predict that this failure will have specific consequences in a lower sense of professional fulfillment for these youngsters as they pursue their careers, and will hamper their ability to stay competitive with contemporaries in many European and Asian countries, where college-bound students typically do get the benefit of first-rate schools. Is it right or sensible to place our children at such a strong disadvantage before they even begin their adult lives?

As the United Negro College Fund aptly puts it, a mind is a terrible thing to waste. It's time to recognize that we have been wasting far too many good ones.

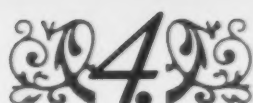


35

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*



BEST COPY AVAILABLE



Do Private Schools Outperform Public Schools?

By Albert Shanker and Bella Rosenberg

DURING THE PAST TWELVE YEARS, we have heard a great deal of talk about how the salvation of American education lies in allowing public dollars to follow students to private and parochial schools. So-called private school choice was at the heart of the Reagan and Bush administrations' education agendas. It continues to be the subject of education hearings, bills and referendum initiatives in many states. It continues to crop up at the local level. And, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, private school choice exists, that is, in the form of a state-initiated "experiment" that allows a small portion of the district's low income students to use state education dollars at nonsectarian private schools that have agreed to participate in the program. (Very few have.)

Of course, this twelve-year period does not represent the first time the public has been asked to subsidize the tuition costs of families who choose, and whose children are chosen by, private schools.

Albert Shanker is president of the American Federation of Teachers. Bella Rosenberg is assistant to the president. This is an updated version of an article that appeared in the Fall 1991 issue of American Educator, the professional journal of the American Federation of Teachers.

Nor is Milwaukee the only place in the nation where public dollars support students in private schools. In fact, private and parochial schools enjoy a considerable amount of public assistance. But what has distinguished this movement for public aid to private education from all others is that this one has been marketed almost exclusively on the basis of education reform and improvement—indeed, as the education reform that would eliminate the need to make any other improvements in our schools.

The pitch goes something like this: "Students in private schools achieve at much higher levels than do public school students. Private schools, particularly Catholic schools, accept students just like the ones attending public schools and do a far better job of educating them. It should be no surprise private schools do so much better. After all, they don't have bureaucracies, teacher unions, tenure, desegregation orders, affirmative action, bans on school prayer or due process in student expulsion cases to contend with; they are subject only to the discipline of the market. Therefore, in order to overcome the crisis in education and for the sake of equity, we should use public funds to help all parents, and especially poor parents, to send their children to private schools. And choice will turn around America's poor record of student

37

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

TABLE 1
AVERAGE PROFICIENCY AND PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS AT OR ABOVE FOUR ANCHOR LEVELS ON THE NAEP MATHEMATICS SCALE BY TYPE OF SCHOOL

	Percent of Students	Average Proficiency	Percentage of Students at or Above			
			Level 200	Level 250	Level 300	Level 350
GRADE 4						
Public Schools	88 (1.2)	214 (0.9)	70 (1.3)	10 (0.8)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Catholic Schools	8 (1.1)	224 (2.0)	83 (2.6)	16 (2.2)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Other Private Schools	4 (0.8)	231 (2.8)	89 (3.8)	22 (3.4)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
GRADE 8						
Public Schools	89 (1.3)	264 (1.2)	97 (0.5)	66 (1.3)	13 (1.3)	0 (0.1)
Catholic Schools	7 (1.1)	278 (2.6)	100 (0.2)	84 (2.6)	22 (3.4)	0 (0.2)
Other Private Schools	4 (0.7)	274 (2.4)	100 (0.5)	80 (3.8)	18 (2.9)	0 (0.0)
GRADE 12						
Public Schools	90 (1.3)	295 (1.1)	100 (0.1)	90 (0.7)	45 (1.4)	5 (0.6)
Catholic Schools	6 (1.1)	302 (3.0)	100 (0.0)	96 (1.2)	54 (4.5)	4 (1.0)
Other Private Schools	4 (0.8)	301 (3.1)	100 (0.0)	97 (1.1)	51 (4.8)	4 (1.8)

The standard errors of the estimated percentages and proficiencies appear in parentheses. It can be said with 95 percent certainty that for each population of interest, the value for the whole population is within plus or minus two standard errors of the estimate for the sample. When the proportion of students is 0 percent, the standard error is inestimable. Although percentages less than 0.5 percent are rounded to 0 percent, a few eighth-grade public school students (0.2 percent) and Catholic school students (0.1 percent) reached Level 350.

DESCRIPTION OF NAEP LEVELS:

Level 200: Simple additive reasoning and problem solving with whole numbers; content typically covered by 3rd grade.

Level 250: Simple multiplicative reasoning and two-step problem solving; content typically covered by 5th grade.

Level 300: Reasoning and problem solving involving fractions, decimals, percents, elementary geometry, and simple algebra; content introduced by 7th grade.

Level 350: Reasoning and problem solving involving geometry, algebra, and beginning statistics and probability; content generally covered in high school math courses in preparation for the study of advanced math.

Source: The State of Mathematics Achievement: NAEP's 1990 Assessment of the Nation and the Trial Assessment of the States, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, June 1991, Table 2.6 and Executive Summary, pp. 6-7.

achievement."

Are the claims of private school choice supporters substantiated? Certainly, there are a number of private schools doing marvelous things for low-income youngsters they choose to admit. It is equally true that there are a number of public schools doing marvelous things for low-income youngsters, even though these public schools cannot select their students and, more often than not, do not have a handful of low-income students but an entire school-ful.

But the answers to the question of private school choice should not turn on a war of anecdotes; each side has heart-warming cases in its arsenal. And although we doubt that research will settle this debate, it can certainly inform it more than anecdotes. What, then, does the evidence tell us about whether private schools are outperform-

ing public schools and about whether they are working with the same kids but getting far better results?

The most relevant, and largest-scale, evidence we have comes from the federally funded National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which has been measuring the achievement of a nationally representative sample of 4th-, 8th- and 12th-graders (previously, 9-, 13- and 17-year-olds) in a variety of subjects for more than twenty years. Although some previous NAEPs included private school students, it was not until the 1990 NAEP in mathematics that comparisons between the achievement of public and private school students were made public. And what these results tell us is that there is virtually no difference in the performance of public and parochial and other private schools. The appalling fact is that students in both sectors are achieving at disastrously

low levels. And what this evidence means is that, under so-called private school choice, if half or even all of our public school students were to "choose" and be chosen by private schools tomorrow, we'd still be a nation at risk. We also would be a nation that had abandoned its common school ideals.

What, specifically, do the 1990 NAEP math results tell us about public and private school performance (Table 1). The most logical place to start is with the 12th grade, the end of the elementary-secondary school road, where we can make some judgments about the value added by a public or private school education. The first thing to notice is that there is only a 6- or 7-point difference, on a 500-point scale, in average scores among seniors in public, Catholic and other private schools. That's not much of a difference, and it is certainly

not evidence of the superiority of private over public education.

It is true that a little over half of seniors in private schools achieve at the 300 level, which means they can handle questions involving decimals, fractions, percents, elementary geometry and simple algebra. This is a few percentage points better than the public school figure, but, again, it's hardly evidence for the excellence of private school education. The relevant fact is that both school sectors performed miserably: Approximately half of our graduating seniors, from both public and private schools, cannot handle math operations they should have mastered before they even entered high school.

For still worse news, let's look at the proportion of graduating seniors who achieved at or above level 350, which NAEP terms an indicator of readiness to tackle college-level math. It is 5 percent in the public schools and 4 percent in both the Catholic and other private schools. Five percent is nothing to cheer about, but neither is 4 percent. It is of course possible that this public school figure is higher than the private schools' only because public schools have a higher dropout rate; more of the kids who would have scored poorly are gone. But if you adjust for public school dropout rate, and even if you ignore the private school dropout rate, the result is that 4 percent of students graduating from public school are prepared to take on college math as are 4 percent of students graduating from Catholic and other private schools. And yet about 30-35 percent of American high school graduates go on to four-year colleges.

These results are even more shocking when you compare them with the achievement of students in our competitor nations, where 20 to 35 percent of students meet standards that are more rigorous than NAEP's 350 level in order to get into college. Given those international standards, it is not unreasonable to assert that 95 percent of our public and private high school graduates would not be admitted to college anywhere else in the industrialized world.

"Okay, so there's not much difference between the performance of public and private schools in the 12th grade, and their students are in a dead heat at NAEP's highest level," private school choice supporters might say. "But look at the 4th- and 8th-grade average scores. There's a 10-17

There is virtually no difference in the performance of public and parochial and other private schools.

spread in points there, and a clear case of private school superiority."

Let's say, then, that it makes more sense to concentrate on results one-third or two-thirds of the way through the education process instead of on the end results. From this perspective, one could just as readily argue that the NAEP results tell us that the longer students stay in private schools, the worse they do, and the longer students stay in public schools, the better they do; private school children end up scoring like public school children, and public school children end up scoring like private school children. And rather than constituting proof of private school superiority, the evidence suggests that public schools add more value to their students than do private schools.

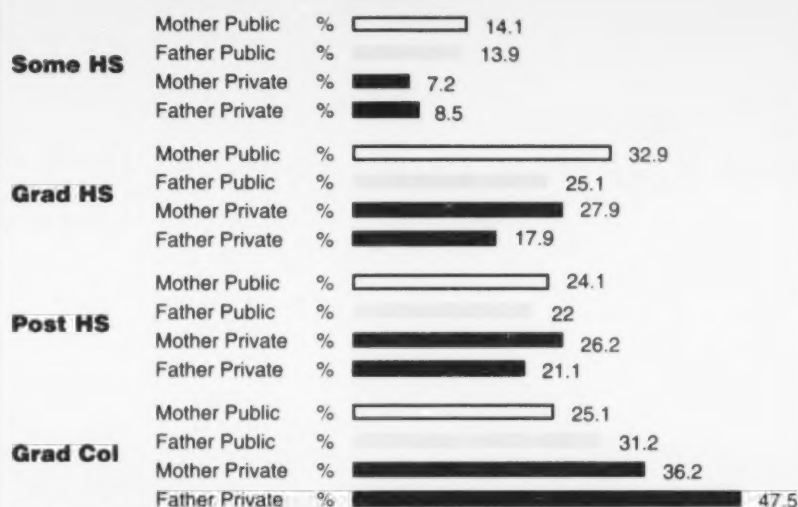
This conclusion looks less glib—and the small differences between public and private school achievement in all the grades looks more shocking—when you examine how different public school students are from the youngsters who attend Catholic and other private schools. Because contrary to what private school choice supporters claim, especially about Catholic schools, the students public and private schools educate are not alike, and not even remotely so. In fact, given the dramatic differences in their socioeconomic status and in the courses they take, to name just two, what's surprising is not that private school students, on average, performed slightly better than public school students but that they didn't leave public school students behind in the dust.

Private school choice proponents like to talk as if the only barrier to a private school education is tuition, a barrier public dollars could topple (though clearly not at the more expensive private schools, where tuition is many times the amount even the most generous voucher proposals would offer). Tuition is certainly a barrier, but the other basic difference between public and private schools is that private schools can and do select their students and turn away applicants who do not meet their standards. For example, 71 percent of Catholic high schools require an entrance exam, as do 43 percent of other religious schools and 66 percent of independent schools. Moreover, 71 percent of Catholic high schools cite student discipline as their chief admissions criterion, and 80 percent require that entering students have suc-

39

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

CHART 1
EDUCATION LEVEL OF PARENTS FOR PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NAEP SAMPLE GRADE 12



Data source: National Assessment of Educational Progress.
Chart prepared by American Federation of Teachers.

successfully completed their previous year of school (National Center for Education Statistics, 1987). Virtually all private schools require interviews with students and parents to see how they will "fit," and most religious schools either do not admit outside their faith or give preference to students from that faith. In other words, private schools are not obliged to take all comers, as public schools must, and they are free to get rid of students who do not work out, who generally end up in the public schools. What private school choice really means, then, is that parents may choose a private school, but it's the private school that ultimately decides whether or not to choose the child.

So who are these students? They turn out to be children who should have given private schools an enormous edge over public schools in achievement. According to the background data in the sample of 12th-grade students tested by NAEP, about 50 percent more private school youngsters than public school youngsters have college-graduate parents (Chart 1). For the nation as a whole, the difference between public and private school students in level of parent education is even more dramatic: 30 percent of parochial school students' parents and 57 percent of the parents of students in other private schools had graduated from college, in comparison with 19 percent of public school students' parents (Chart 2).

If there is anything education research tells us it

is that higher education translates into higher incomes, and both are strongly associated with higher academic achievement. Even on the basis of family income alone, private school students should have performed dramatically better. According to national figures, about three times as many public school students as private and parochial school students had family incomes under \$15,000, while twice as many parochial school students and more than three times as many other private school students had family incomes of \$50,000 and more (Chart 3). Consider, too, that private schools in the NAEP sample and nationally are dramati-

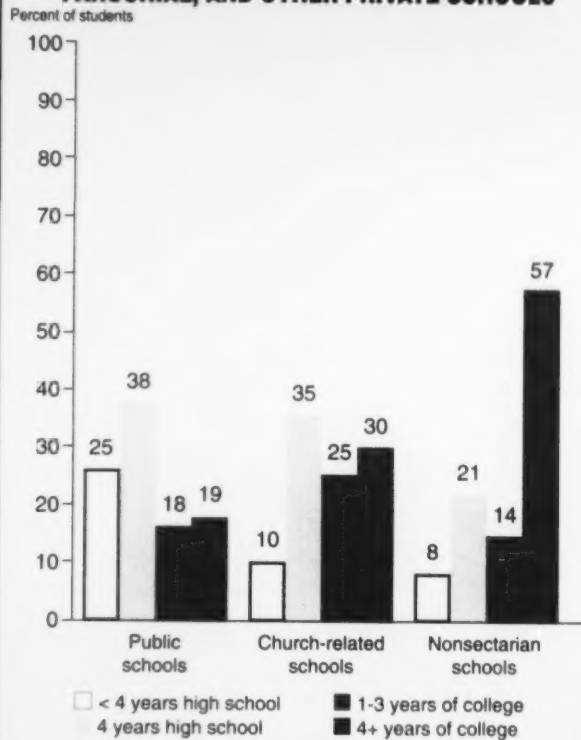
cally underrepresented in rural and disadvantaged communities, where the nation's poorest youngsters live, and that poverty is strongly associated with lower academic achievement.

Socioeconomic status makes a big difference in student achievement, but school counts, too. And there are big differences in what public and private school students take in school. For example, 81 percent of the private school seniors and only 56 percent of the public school seniors in the NAEP sample were in an academic track. (More on this private school "advantage" later—and on why ending choice of curriculums in public school is a far better strategy for improving education than starting a so-called private school choice system.) So why, given that taking more academic courses, like having better-educated and wealthier parents, is strongly associated with higher scores, did public and private schools have an identical record in the percentage of students they produced who were prepared to handle college-level math? And why were the average scores of private school seniors so close to those of public school seniors?

In fact, these considerable differences between the family and academic backgrounds of public and private school youngsters explain why, when you look only at *average* test scores, private school students do somewhat better—though well below what you would expect, given their advantages. But what happens when you compare the NAEP

CHART 2

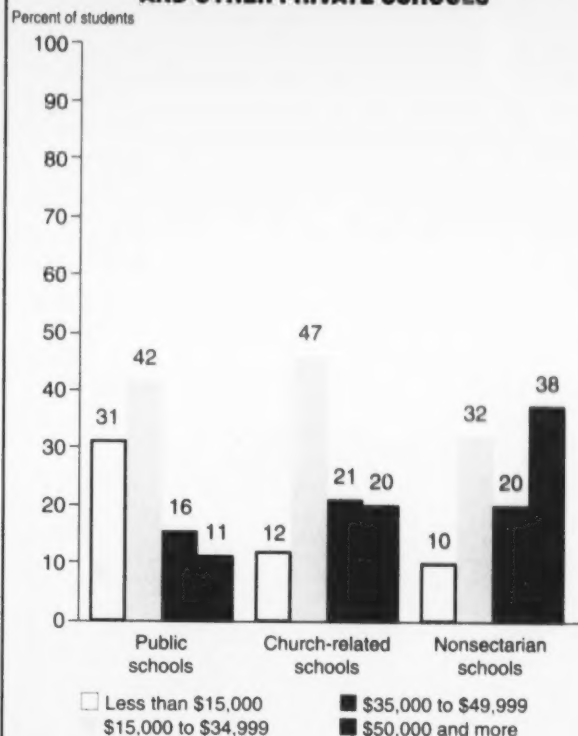
PARENTAL EDUCATION LEVELS OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY STUDENTS IN PUBLIC, PAROCHIAL, AND OTHER PRIVATE SCHOOLS



Source: Private Schools in the United States: A Statistical Profile, With Comparisons to Public Schools, Figure 3-6, p. 47, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, February 1991.

CHART 3

FAMILY INCOME OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY STUDENTS IN PUBLIC, PAROCHIAL, AND OTHER PRIVATE SCHOOLS



Source: Private Schools in the United States: A Statistical Profile, With Comparisons to Public Schools, Figure 3-5, p. 46, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, February 1991.

scores of public and private school students who have similar family backgrounds and who have taken similar courses—if you compare apples with apples? The answer is that their achievement is almost identical.

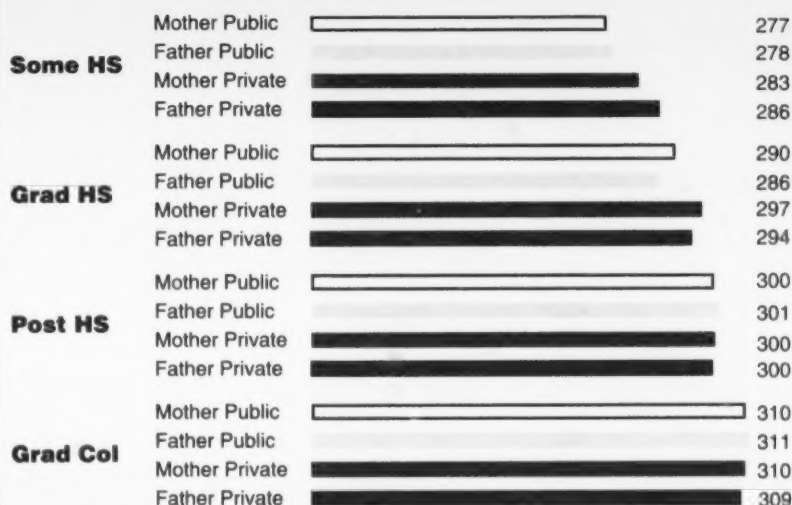
For example, when you compare the scores of public and private 12th-graders whose parents have similar education levels, the sector differences become even narrower (Chart 4). Or look at the results when 8th-graders are matched according to the math courses they have taken: Public school students who have had pre-algebra score 274 and private school students score 273. The results are similar for 8th-graders who have taken algebra, except that public school kids score four points higher than kids from private schools: 298 as opposed to 294 (Chart 5).

It's the same story when you compare the scores of public and private school seniors who have taken similar courses (Chart 6). Among kids who have taken only Algebra I, private school students score slightly better; and among kids who have

taken more advanced courses, public school students score slightly better. But the point is that when you look at private and public school kids who have done the same coursework, there are no big differences in their achievement; there is no private school "advantage." And when you consider that these comparisons by courses taken did not factor in the big differences in public and private school students' backgrounds, the proposition that public schools are adding more value to their students than are private schools becomes even more plausible.

John Chubb and Terry Moe have contended that the reason public and private school achievement is so close in the 12th grade is that public high schools get many private school student transfers. These well-prepared transfers, according to their argument, are the yeast that makes public school achievement rise (Chubb and Moe, 1991). The source of data for Chubb and Moe's contention is the National Education Longitudinal Study of the Eighth Grade Class of 1988

CHART 4
MATHEMATICS ACHIEVEMENT AT GRADE 12
BY LEVEL OF PARENTAL EDUCATION
PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS



Data source: National Assessment of Educational Progress.
Chart prepared by American Federation of Teachers.

(NELS:88), which tested a large group of students in eighth grade and again in tenth grade and found that the youngsters in private schools had made much greater gains than public school students. However, like comparisons of public and private schools using "average" test scores—be they NAEP, the SAT or any other instrument—this turns out to be half the story.

A whopping 37 percent of students left parochial school for public school after eighth grade. But who were these kids? It turns out that almost half of them came from families whose socioeconomic status fell in the bottom 25 percent. The transfer of these private school students into public schools almost certainly did not raise public schools' scores; rather, their departure from private schools almost certainly raised parochial school scores. The evidence points in exactly the opposite direction from what Chubb and Moe claim (NELS:88).

Chubb and Moe have further suggested that the 1990 national NAEP results in mathematics are an anomaly. Yet that, too, does not withstand scrutiny. For one, although this was the first time that NAEP reported out public-private school comparisons, it is not the first time that NAEP collected private school data. In 1988, Chester E. Finn, Jr., who was then an assistant secretary in the U.S. Department of Education, presented unpublished public-private school comparisons

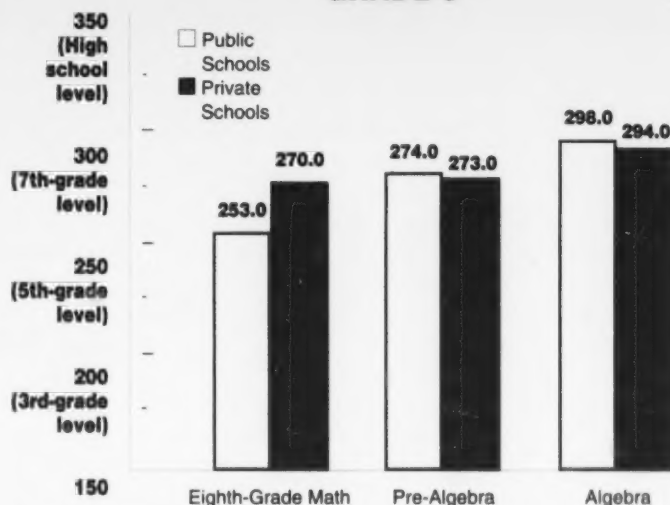
from the 1986 NAEP assessments of reading, history and literature to the annual meeting of the National Association of Independent Schools. According to Finn, private school students (including parochial school kids) scored, on average, only about four points higher than public school students on reading and six points higher on history and literature. He also said that the soon-to-be-released 1986 math exams would show similar results. "There's a differential," he said, according to *Education Week*, "but it's a very small differential, in an area where the public school performance is scandalously low" (Goldberg, p. 1).

Finn then pointed out that twice as many private school students as public school students taking the tests had parents who were college graduates, and that this probably explained the slightly higher average private school score: "With differences that large in parent education, it is conceivable that there's no school effect showing up here at all." His advice to the private-school audience? "You need to improve faster than the public schools if you expect to continue to have people paying an average of \$6,200 a year for day schools. . . in order to get a presumably better educational product."

Second, the American Federation of Teachers has conducted preliminary analyses of the national NAEP assessments in science in 1990 and math in 1992 along the lines presented here for the 1990 NAEP in math. All these analyses are consistent with the conclusions we have presented here.

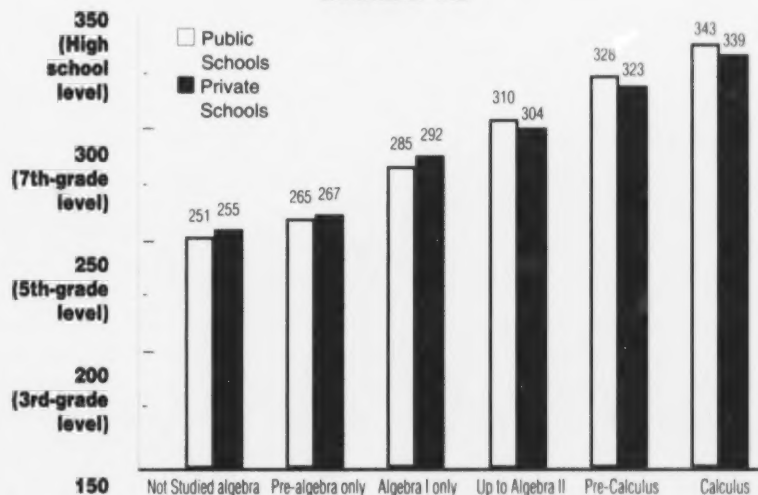
Even James S. Coleman, whose 1981 analysis of public-private school performance is cited as the premier source of scientific evidence of private school superiority, warned that "one should not make a mistake: Our estimates for the size of the private-sector effects show them not to be large" (Coleman, 1981, p. 19). A small army of other researchers have shown that the small private school edge found by Coleman disappeared when differences in students' family background and course taking were examined.

CHART 5
AVERAGE OVERALL MATHEMATICS PROFICIENCY
BY STUDENTS TAKING SIMILAR COURSES
GRADE 8



Data source: National Assessment of Educational Progress 1990, Student Data
Chart prepared by American Federation of Teachers.

CHART 6
AVERAGE OVERALL MATHEMATICS PROFICIENCY
BY STUDENTS TAKING SIMILAR COURSES
GRADE 12



Data source: National Assessment of Educational Progress 1990, Student Data
Chart prepared by American Federation of Teachers.

That leaves Chubb and Moe's *Politics, Markets & America's Schools* (1990). Lots of politicians and op-ed writers have repeated their findings as gospel, and many individuals have become converts to public aid for private education on their

academic authority. But as their peer reviewers and even a few statistics-savvy journalists have pointed out, Chubb and Moe's study of public and private high schools also did not find a private school advantage once students' background characteristics and academic courses were taken into account; their "choice" recommendations were not supported by the results of their analysis.

The failure of Chubb and Moe's analysis to yield them support for their conclusions is not particularly surprising. The evidence they use comes exclusively from the High School and Beyond Study, the same data that failed to yield Coleman sizable private-sector effects. Moreover, despite the considerable print they expend on discussing why their handling of this data is an advance over other researchers' methods, Chubb and Moe virtually ignore all that has been learned about how to responsibly work with what is now acknowledged to be this deeply flawed, if not worthless, data set. What they do instead is highly unorthodox. A short list includes throwing in elite private and other private schools along with Catholic schools in a way that automatically conferred a private school advantage in their pub-

lic-private analysis; constructing a school organization measure comprising fifty variables, making it almost impossible to single out the effects of any one variable; pioneering the use of a dependent variable that measures achievement change in a

43

American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader

way that exaggerates high and low performance differences—and then conceding, in a footnote in the back of their book, that this has no substantive meaning; and reporting results in terms of average differences between schools in the highest quartile of performance (87.5th percentile) and the lowest quartile (12.5th percentile), which makes for very extreme comparisons. And, as John Witte has decisively pointed out, “*They never directly test the differential effect of public and private schools on achievement . . . [P]rior studies either ran separate regressions for public and private school students, or analyzed all students together but included a variable indicating whether the student was in a public or private school. They did neither.*” Methodological pyrotechnics notwithstanding, Chubb and Moe still fail to prove their hypothesis: *All of their variables taken together explain only about 5 percent of the variation in achievement; and even when they ask what would happen if we moved students from a school in the lowest quartile of effective organization to the highest, the answer is they’d get less than one more answer correct on a 115-item test* (Witte, 1991, p. 21; Rosenberg, Dec. 1990-Jan. 1991; Shanker and Rosenberg, Winter 1991; Witte, 1990; Bryk and Lee, 1992).

Another two pieces of evidence debunking the private school superiority myth come from Milwaukee. The first concerns Catholic schools, and it is a rare find because Catholic and other private schools are not required to report their students’ test scores to the public. When Catholic schools do on occasion, it is always in terms of average scores aggregated at the local or national level. But the *Milwaukee Journal’s* religion reporter, Marie Rohde, persisted in asking the Milwaukee archdiocese to provide a finer breakdown, and her request was eventually granted. In a story that ran in the *Journal* on August 1, 1991, Rohde reported that, “Minority students enrolled in Milwaukee’s Catholic elementary schools suffer the same lag in achievement test scores as their counterparts in the public schools, according to test results made public for the first time.” The test was the same one used by the Milwaukee public schools, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. The scores, Rohde continued, “run counter to long-standing claims by most Catholic educators that they are doing a superior job of teaching disadvantaged children.” In fact, while the scores of public school minority students have been stable, those of minority children in the Milwaukee Catholic schools have declined.

According to Rohde, John Norris, superintendent of the Catholic schools, blamed the gap on “socioeconomic” factors and said that test scores of

DON IPOCK

44

*The Task
Before Us:
A QuEST
Reader*

Catholic and public schools "should not be directly compared." But two years earlier, when the archdiocese used a different test from the one in the public schools and reported out the scores without breaking them down by race or individual school, it did make such a comparison: "The bottom line is, in our system we perform better than the national average, and we are dealing with minority people in an inner city situation." The real bottom line is that averages can obscure as much as they illuminate. The higher scores of advantaged Catholic school students had masked the poor achievement levels of minority Catholic school students, most of whom were concentrated in separate schools.

The other piece of evidence from Milwaukee comes from its much vaunted, state-initiated voucher experiment. The product of a coalition between Polly Williams, a Democratic state legislator from Milwaukee and the former chair of Jesse Jackson's presidential campaign efforts in Wisconsin, and Governor Tommy Thompson, a conservative Republican, the Milwaukee voucher program began in September of 1990 and was open to a maximum of 1,000 low-income children in a district where about 60,000 children met the law's definition of poverty. The voucher was worth \$2,500, paid out of the public schools' budget. The law excluded religious schools from participating, but twenty-one private schools were eligible; only seven volunteered to participate.

Estimates of how many families initially applied for the voucher vary from 600 to 750, but in the end 341 students were accepted by the seven private schools. By June of 1991, 249 students remained, in part because one school, which had been a religious school until shortly before the program began, went bankrupt and its sixty-three voucher students returned to the public schools; some voucher students were expelled, while others dropped out or moved. The following September, eighty-six of the remaining 249 voucher students did not return to their private schools. Second-year non-return rates were also high.

According to the first- and second-year evaluations of the program, while the parents of the participating students met the low-income criterion, they also tended to be more educated than the

All the talk about how private schools are doing a better job than public schools, especially with disadvantaged students, is just talk.

low-income public school parents. Voucher parents also had been more active in the public schools and more dissatisfied with them than the average public school parent. Their involvement in the private schools was even higher than it had been when their children attended public schools, and their satisfaction levels were greater. Why so many of them did not return their children to the private schools begs further exploration.

What about the achievement of the voucher students, the prime justification for the experiment? Short-term evaluation results do not make for conclusive evidence, but these certainly undermine the argument that private schools do a better job of educating low-income students than public schools. There were no dramatic gains in achievement among the voucher students, and their performance was about equal to that of the low-income students in the Milwaukee public schools (Witte, 1991;

Witte, et al., 1992).

The evidence is fairly overwhelming, then, that all the talk about how private schools are doing a better job than public schools, especially with disadvantaged students, is just talk. However, this does not mean that private schools have nothing to teach public schools. For instance, public schools could stop giving students a choice of curriculums—they choose easier ones—and insist that they take more academically challenging courses, the way they do in Catholic and other private schools. Indeed, in addition to choosing students, the main private school "advantage" consists of not offering their students much choice. If making public-private school comparisons has taught us anything, it is not that choice will turn around our schools; it is that clear and rigorous standards in education are absolutely essential.

The public school system also could start heeding the message many parents, especially poor minority parents, have been trying to convey when they remove their children to Catholic and other private schools: Teachers can't teach and students can't learn when a handful of violent or disruptive kids are allowed to terrorize the school community. Something needs to be done for those kids, but right now the failure of many school boards to face up to the issue means that public school youngsters who want to achieve, and that's a majority,

45

American Federation of Teachers: A QuEST Reader

are being held hostage by a small minority of destructive kids. Private schools do not tolerate that, and neither should public schools.

Another lesson private schools have to teach policymakers and the public is about children in poverty. As the NAEP results indicate, most of the advantage private schools have in average scores is due to their more advantaged student body. In fact, the results of NAEP and other assessments demonstrate that childhood poverty is not only bad for America morally and socially; it is also a disaster educationally. Of course, many poor children do very well in school, and education continues to be a major route out of poverty. But it is also the case that poverty, especially when it is accompanied by family and community disintegration, is associated with lower academic achievement. Overcoming childhood poverty may not solve our crisis in education, but it would take us a good stretch down that road.

Would permitting public dollars to follow children to private and parochial schools turn our education system upside down? Would it destroy neighborhood schools and transform public education into a system for the have-nots? Would it violate the separation between church and state to the detriment of both? Could it lead to public money going to cult schools, radical schools (of the left and the right) and crassly commercial schools thrown together by people out for a quick buck? Would it mean less accountability in education because private and parochial schools, unlike public schools, are not required to publicly report their test results or their finances? Might it sanction a school system stratified by class, religion, ethnicity and race and thereby undermine our pluralistic democracy?

The risks involved in public aid to private education are substantial, and they are not balanced by any evidence of educational benefit. In fact, the results of NAEP and other national studies show that if we want American children to meet "world-class" education standards—or even be able to do junior high math by the time they leave high school—then spending tax dollars to send them to private and parochial schools is a bankrupt strategy.

The dismal performance of private schools also

The majority of American parents believe that their youngsters, and the schools they attend, are performing well.

means that those who have charged that bureaucracy or teacher unions or desegregation orders or democratic control is chiefly responsible for our crisis in education had better look elsewhere because private schools are not constrained by any of these. But it further means that public schools cannot blame their dismal performance exclusively on the deterioration of families and communities. Because even if we were to get the kinds of kids private schools have—hand-picked and with parents who are relatively well-educated and able and/or motivated to spend money on schooling—and even if we, like the private schools, were to have smaller schools or class sizes or more flexibility in removing troublemakers, the evidence indicates that student achievement would still be at a level that is far below the best international stan-

dards.

That is shocking, but it should not cause us to despair. Rather, it underscores, and in the strongest possible way, the case for restructuring our schools. The majority of our youngsters—and even the hand-picked, more academically tracked students in private schools—are not achieving at the levels they and this nation need. As surprising, then, as the results of the public-private school comparisons may be, they are not really shocking: Public and private schools by and large have the same textbooks, the same curriculums, the same internal organizations—and the same mediocre academic standards. Exceptions exist in both sectors, which, of course, means these are not sectoral differences.

Public and private schools also have students who are subject to the same incentives for working hard in school—that is to say, very few such incentives. College-bound students in both public and private schools know they'll be able to find a college that will accept them, no matter how poor their grades are or how little they know, as long as they have a high school diploma and, usually, money—and in the latter case, the private school kids do have an advantage. The one exception is students, in either school sector, who hope to attend elite universities; they have to work very hard indeed.

As for going to work from high school, students in both public and private schools know that employers don't ask to see high school transcripts and don't even offer decent jobs to high school

46

*The Task
Before Us:
A QuEST
Reader*

graduates until they are twenty-four or so, if then. So a student who has worked hard at rigorous courses will be competing for the same poor job at the same low pay as a student who has filled his schedule with soft courses that he barely passed. And these bad lessons are being learned by students in public and private schools alike.

What about parents? Why aren't they making sure youngsters apply themselves? That's easy. Whether kids are in public or private schools, most parents won't be successful at pressuring them to work harder when the kids can tell them, "I've already done what I need to do to get what I want."

As for teachers, they have a hard enough time, under the best of circumstances, persuading kids that history or physics or even regular attendance is "relevant" to their future lives. But when the kids can say, "I don't need that to get into college or to get a job; it doesn't count" or "Taking that course will pull my average down," the battle is lost before it starts.

One solution—though it's by no means the only one—is for American businesses to link getting jobs with high school achievement and for colleges to do the same thing in setting admission standards. Elementary and secondary schools would then have backup for upholding standards. Parents and teachers would have backup when they say, "Unless you turn off the television set and work harder, you're not going to make it." And our students would have evidence that working hard and learning something are essential to getting what they want. At the very least, they would see a reason to achieve, and because they're no less able than students in our competitor nations, they would.

The poor outcomes of both public and private education also indicate that there is not much to the argument that the competition school choice would produce would in turn serve as an excellent accountability system. As the argument goes, parents would make school decisions on the basis of educational excellence, so bad schools would go under and good schools would thrive and be replicated. But there are parents who choose private schools and who keep their youngsters there

despite, as NAEP tells us, their mediocre performance. This suggests that under a choice system, schools would not necessarily compete, nor parents choose, primarily on the basis of educational quality and outcomes. It is well worth remembering that the majority of American parents believe that their youngsters, and the schools they attend, are performing well.

Choice, then, may be a reasonable incentive if we want schools to work hard to attract customers, but it is a poor incentive for getting them to focus on improving student achievement. The only way to do that is to do so directly, that is, to move to a standards-driven education system and to design schoolwide incentives in which there are rewards for improving student achievement and consequences for failure.

The idea of an accountability system for schools that involves rewards and consequences is radical and controversial, and it would need to be tested to see what works, when and how. But the idea of an accountability system based on private school choice is also radical and controversial, and the evidence tells us it would not work. This much is very clear: Even if the public rejects private school choice, it will not stand for the status quo in public education. Either there will be a new kind of accountability system in education that both the public and educators can believe in or some crazy accountability scheme that would be disastrous both for education and this nation will be imposed on us.

The private school choice schemes that are being pushed across the nation will not help kids find out that they need to work hard in school to get what they want, just as they must on the athletic field and in the world of work. They will not stimulate schools to focus on improving student achievement and to experiment with new ways of doing so. They will not help poor schools to get better, nor will they empty them out. They will not produce greater accountability in education; they undoubtedly will yield less. They certainly will not eradicate the effects of childhood poverty. And they will not solve the crisis in education because that crisis afflicts public and private schools alike.

47

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*



Raising Standards For American Education

48
*The Task
Before Us:
A QuEST
Reader*

PART ONE

Are National Standards and a System of Assessments Desirable?

THE COUNCIL FINDS THAT SETTING national standards and developing a system of assessments measuring progress toward the standards are desirable. The Council discussed national standards and a system of assessments as a means of tracking progress toward the National Education Goals. Standards and assessments are important tools to help the nation achieve the goals by raising expectations and providing information so that available resources can be better targeted. In addition, national standards and a system of assessments tied to them can play key roles in addressing three national priorities. First, they

can help us extend the opportunity for a high-quality education to all Americans. Second, they can strengthen democratic institutions and values while enabling all citizens to participate more effectively in the political process. Third, they can enhance economic competitiveness by improving the nation's human capital—the abilities and skills of the country's workers and entrepreneurs.

High national educational standards and a system of assessments to measure their attainment can play a vital role in raising expectations, especially for youngsters from groups that have historically experienced less academic success. While the Council recognizes that new standards and assessments alone are not a complete education reform strategy, world-class standards and quality assessments can be powerful catalysts for implementing

This is excerpted from a report to the nation by the National Council on Education Standards and Testing in January 1992. To follow up on the work of the president and the nation's governors at the 1989 national education summit, Congress created the council—made up of educators and other leaders—to examine the desirability and feasibility of national standards and assessments. The full report, Raising Standards for American Education, is available from the U.S. Government Printing Office, ISBN 0-16-036097-8.

the systemic change necessary to bring all students, leaving no one behind, to high performance standards. The Council has concluded that standards and assessments have the potential to boost the performance of students who are currently above average as well as those who are now the least successful. By emphasizing their applicability to all students, standards and assessments will help assure that adequate resources are available and appropriately targeted to helping all students attain the standards.

To achieve this ambitious purpose, there are three important considerations. First, poor initial performance should not be used to divert students into less demanding courses with lower expectations but rather must lead to improved instruction and redoubled effort. Second, policymakers should seek to ensure that schools provide all their students with opportunities to master the demanding new material in the standards in an atmosphere where achievement is prized. Third, students with disabilities or of limited English proficiency should be provided opportunities to learn and to demonstrate their mastery of material under circumstances that take into account their special needs.

High-quality national standards and a system of assessments have the potential of helping all students acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and shared values to deepen and renew our civic culture and of enabling all citizens to participate more effectively in the political processes of democracy. In recent decades, the population has grown increasingly diverse. The Council carefully considered the concerns that standards and assessments might have the effect of homogenizing the culture.

It is the Council's intent that the standards reflect and be enriched by the nation's pluralistic heritage as well as its shared democratic values and institutions.

Two important considerations have helped shape a number of the Council's recommendations. First, the Council decided that the standards should not be used as a national curriculum. Rather, they should serve as a basic core of important understandings that all students need to acquire, but certainly not everything a student should learn. States and local jurisdictions need to retain the capacity to include a substantial amount of additional material reflecting their particular interests and emphases. Second, the system of assessments the Council is recommending is not a single national test. Instead, states, individually or collectively, will be encouraged to develop or acquire their own instruments to assess progress toward the national standards. In these important ways, the nation's legal and historical traditions of state and local control of education are preserved

while still developing common ground on key aspects of education that are vital for all Americans.

The United States has historically demonstrated a remarkable ability to bind together a wide variety of groups into one nation. A common understanding of the knowledge and skills future generations of citizens should possess has the potential to serve as a powerful force for national unity, social vitality, and cultural vibrancy.

High standards for student attainment are critical to enhancing America's economic competitiveness. The quality of human capital, the knowledge and skills of labor and management, helps determine a nation's ability to compete in the world marketplace. International comparisons, however, consistently show that the academic performance of American students is below that of students in many other developed countries. The relative deficiency in America's human capital contributes to the inability of many firms in the United States to compete internationally. Low skill levels may also be impeding American business from shifting to newer, more efficient methods of production that require greater responsibility and skill on the part of front-line workers. These deficiencies likely affect the standard of living of all Americans, but the effects are felt most keenly by those who do not have adequate skills. The Council thus concludes that world-class standards for student performance and a way of assessing progress toward them can be part of education's contribution to addressing the nation's deficit in human capital and increasing competitiveness in the global marketplace.

The Council finds, as do many in the business community, that standards set in specific academic subject areas should include the type of useful workplace skills described in the U.S. Department of Labor's SCANS (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills) report. In addition to the academic knowledge identified in the SCANS report, skills and personal qualities, such as acquiring and evaluating data, working in teams, monitoring and correcting performance, self-management, solving problems, and knowing how to learn are important for success at work. To the extent possible, these types of skills can and should be integrated into the national standards and assessments. Together with high-quality technical training and the broad knowledge provided by a solid academic education, such skills can go a long way toward creating the literate and competent workforce necessary for a productive economy.

THE COUNCIL HAS COME TO THE CONCLUSION that developing high national standards and a system of assessments measur-

49

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

ing the degree to which they are attained has the potential to provide families, educators, and policymakers with the information necessary to make wise educational decisions.

In the absence of demanding content and performance standards, the United States has gravitated toward having a *de facto* minimal skills curriculum. The many state minimum competency tests, the lower-level skills orientation of most textbooks, and state and local policies that do not adequately promote quality are examples of this minimal approach. The Council finds that what has been demanded is insufficient in that it covers far too little of the knowledge and skills students need to succeed in the modern workplace and to participate in the democratic process. Such low expectations shortchange students and ill serve the country. Yet as long as today's low standards remain in place, the performance of the majority of students is unlikely to improve substantially.

Standards developed at the national and state levels should have a number of specific components:

- *An overarching statement* for each subject area to provide a guiding vision of its content and purpose;

- *Content standards* that describe the knowledge, skills, and other understandings that schools should teach in order for students to attain high levels of competency in challenging subject matter;

- *Student performance standards* that define various levels of competence in the challenging subject matter set out in the content standards;

- *School delivery standards* developed by the states collectively from which each state could select the criteria that it finds useful for the purpose of assessing a school's capacity and performance; and

- *System performance standards* that provide evidence about the success of schools, local school systems, states, and the nation in bringing all students, leaving no one behind, to high performance standards.

The Council concludes that national standards should have the following characteristics:

- *High expectations—not expectations of minimal competency.* The Council noted that educational expectations are currently too low and that, as a result, too many American students perform accordingly. Setting world-class standards will purposefully address this deficiency. Students, regardless of background, will be challenged to meet these high standards.

- *Focus and direction—not a national curriculum.* Standards set would be neither exhaustive nor all inclusive. They should be viewed as a common

California Overarching Statement on Mathematics

MATHEMATICAL POWER, WHICH involves the ability to discern mathematical relationships, reason logically, and use mathematical techniques effectively, must be the central concern of mathematics education and must be the context in which skills are developed.

Excerpted from: California Mathematics Framework, California State Department of Education. (1992).

core that would be enhanced through considerable state and local flexibility. Within the broad framework of the standards, schools and teachers would have the discretion to develop their own detailed curricula, determine subject sequencing, choose materials, select pedagogy, and add content reflecting local and state interests and diversity.

- *National—not federal.* The standards, arrived at through consensus, will be national in character and applicability. It would be inappropriate for the federal government to create or mandate the new standards. Standards-setting must involve the widest possible participation in the process from individuals and groups at the national, state, and local levels, as Congress has noted in the legislation establishing this Council.

- *Voluntary—not mandatory.* Adopting the national standards will be voluntary. The Council anticipates that high-quality standards, developed through a broad and open process, will be widely used.

- *Dynamic—not static.* While care should be taken to develop quality standards from the outset, the process will be ongoing, entailing improvement and refinement over time in order to remain world class. It is imperative that standards keep pace with the development of knowledge in the subject fields.

To make standards meaningful, the Council has determined that a system of assessing students' success in attaining them is desirable. A national system of assessments should be created that contains two components: student assessments that can provide results for individual students; and large-scale sample assessments, such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The key features of both components would be alignment with national content and performance standards and the capacity to produce useful, comparable results that are available

to all key levels, including students and their parents, schools, districts, states, and the nation. To assist in developing informed judgments on performance, states and localities should report results in the context of information such as opportunity to learn and relevant conditions of learning.

A national system of assessments should also have the following features:

■ *Multiple assessments—not a single test.* It will be up to states, individually or in groups, to adopt assessments linked to the national standards. States can design the assessments or they may acquire them.

■ *Voluntary—not mandatory.* State participation in the national system of assessments will be voluntary. The federal government will not require that states adopt any particular tests.

■ *Developmental—not static.* The system should be developmental. It should change and evolve over time, maintaining alignment with the national content and performance standards and incorporating improved assessment techniques as these are developed.

Assessments must address important technical issues of reliability, validity, and fairness. Professional standards exist for resolving many of these issues. Particular attention must be paid to the reliability, validity, and fairness of assessment instruments and testing conditions when high stakes for students or educators are attached to test results.

A national initiative to develop world-class standards and a system of high-quality assessments that measure progress toward them is vital for reforming American education, for the following reasons.

American education would be well served by an organized attempt to provide direction on a nationwide basis and to determine some of the important skills and knowledge that all students should master at key stages in their education, without trying to specify a national curriculum. Articulating standards and developing assessments that provide educators and students with targets toward which to marshal their efforts can contribute to more efficient use of available resources. Educators place different emphases on what students should learn at various points in their schooling. In an increasingly mobile society, many

Standards and assessments can serve as catalysts for raising expectations.

students attend a number of different schools over the course of their education, often in different communities or states. Frequently, teachers do not know what they can reasonably expect students to have learned before entering their classrooms and cannot be sure what will be taught afterward. The Council concludes that these educational problems are national in scope and would be addressed best through a nationally coordinated effort. While respecting local and regional diversity, such an effort could take advantage of the useful work already under way in many states and localities, sharing lessons and avoiding unnecessary duplication.

New standards and assessments that provide information useful to improving instruction

and student learning would likely be perceived as valuable tools by many teachers. In the absence of national standards, the results from current standardized assessments are sometimes more a source of confusion than a tool for improving instruction. Teachers sometimes feel pressured by the consequences attached to test results to narrow instruction and focus on the minimal skills measured by some current tests. Many of these tests are not designed to guide instruction. The Council notes that recent assessments have explored alternative ways of measuring what students are to learn, and new efforts should build on the important work now under way.

More accurate and dependable sources of information on progress toward achieving the National Education Goals would be an important incentive to change education. The Council recommends that reliable and comparable data on the performance of students against meaningful standards be available to five important levels in education: individual students and their parents, schools, districts, states, and the nation. Families want and need comprehensible information on students' progress toward high standards. To exercise informed judgment, educators and policymakers similarly need reliable data on student progress in meeting high-quality standards as well as information on other outcomes. The Council concludes that a national effort to set standards and coordinate the development of a system of assessments could provide data that are both high quality and comparable.

51

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

The Council further finds a need to shift the basis of educational accountability away from measures of inputs and processes to evidence of progress toward desired outcomes. Given the substantial outlay of public funds on elementary and secondary education in the United States, elected officials and policymakers have understandably been concerned with ensuring that taxpayers' dollars are well spent. Unfortunately, the lack of high standards and quality assessments that measure progress toward them has in the past resulted in accountability being tied primarily to compliance with rules and regulations or to data from assessments measuring only minimal skills. The Council believes that accountability needs to be refocused toward performance. This is especially true where consequences for students or educators are attached to performance on these measures.

The Council finds that a nationally coordinated initiative would result in high-quality outcome measures that can be used for accountability. A national effort would address squarely the necessary technical issues of developing assessments that are valid, reliable, and fair. Unprecedented national attention—by testing experts, educators, policymakers, and the public—could be focused on the system of assessments and use of the results for accountability.

Standards and assessments can serve as catalysts for raising expectations. In many states and localities, the minimum competency skills standards put in place in the 1970s and early 1980s resulted in changes that have helped many youngsters attain at least these low-level skills. The work of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics to create content standards in mathematics has already influenced the development of state curriculum frameworks and assessments. The College Board Advanced Placement program's course guides and examinations are widely recognized as valuable and useful tools that have helped to provide quality instruction to millions of students across the country. In California, curriculum and assessment reforms are the cornerstone of a strategic education plan that includes changing professional development, instructional methods, textbooks, technology, and other classroom materials.

Setting standards and developing quality assessments of progress toward them should be a national effort. An increasingly global economy requires that national standards be set at world-class levels. Such an unprecedented initiative in this country must find its way through uncharted waters relating to difficult technical and policy issues. Undertaking this effort at the national rather than state or local levels can help to achieve cost effectiveness and marshal the talent and

scarce public resources needed to deal adequately with these issues.

The Council finds a quality system of national standards and assessments embodying the important qualities discussed in this section to be highly desirable. Given that education serves important national purposes, including equitable opportunity for all Americans, enhancing the nation's civic culture, and improving the economic competitiveness of the United States, and because many of the difficulties of developing high-quality standards and assessments can be addressed best at the national level, the Council recommends a coordinated national effort that respects local prerogatives and diversity in educating students to world-class levels. Such an effort is the necessary next step in achieving the ambitious National Education Goals and has the potential to spur a nationwide process of educational renewal. Rather than threaten local autonomy, standards and assessments can support efforts to improve the quality of education. Standards and a national system of assessments would provide those designing state curriculum and testing systems with a valuable resource developed through a national consensus process. They further provide a focus on improving student performance and could lead to more effective and efficient allocation of resources at the local, state, and national levels.

PART TWO

Is it Feasible to Develop National Standards and a System of Assessments?

THE COUNCIL FINDS IT FEASIBLE AS WELL as desirable to create national education standards and a system of assessments linked to the standards. Precedents set by states, localities, professional organizations, and other groups demonstrate that this undertaking is feasible.

The process of setting standards is at various levels of development in the five subjects emphasized in the National Education Goals and should be expanded into other subjects, such as citizenship education, foreign languages, and the visual and performing arts. Attention should also be

given to developing standards for the application of knowledge to complicated, real world problems that demand integrating student knowledge from several disciplines. The Council recommends that standards be developed through a broad-based process that involves educators, including scholars in each field. Teachers should play a key role in this process. So, too, should representatives of business and the public. The standards-setting process should be informed by work in other industrialized countries in order to ensure that the new standards are world class.

The process envisioned is a dynamic one with standards updated to meet changes in scholarship and to remain world class. Work that is under way demonstrates empirically that standards-setting is feasible and that the process itself may contribute to educational renewal. The National Assessment Governing Board's process for developing guidelines is an example of professional consensus-building and nationwide participation. The Council recommends that national education standards build upon the following current professional efforts.

English

Literature is the subject matter specific to the English curriculum. Reading and writing, speaking and listening are communication skills that

NCTM Standard 5: Algebra

IN GRADES 9-12, THE MATHEMATICS CURRICULUM should include the continued study of algebraic concepts and methods so that all students can—

- represent situations that involve variable quantities with expressions, equations, inequalities and matrices;
 - use tables and graphs as tools to interpret expressions, equations and inequalities;
 - operate on expressions and matrices, and solve equations and inequalities;
 - appreciate the power of mathematical abstraction and symbolism;
- and so that, in addition, college-intending students can—
- use matrices to solve linear systems;
 - demonstrate technical facility with algebraic transformations, including techniques based on theory of equations.

Excerpted from: Curriculum and Evaluation Standards for School Mathematics, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (1985).

underlie it. The content and processes of the English curriculum enrich life experiences, increase employability, and enhance communication. Standards developed in this subject have broad applicability in every subject of the curriculum.

All students, regardless of background, should have access to both the content and processes of the English curriculum and be able to respond thoughtfully and knowledgeably about a wide variety of major works of high-quality literature. Students sometimes have not been introduced to literature because the focus has been on the basic skills. Often, writing is little more than filling in the blanks or composing a single sentence.

Important work has been done in this area by a number of states and organizations. For example, the assessment frameworks for reading and writing created by the National Assessment Governing Board for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the curriculum guidelines created by the state of Maine may be useful to examine in any standards-setting effort.

Mathematics

All students need a solid foundation in mathematics that goes beyond simple arithmetic and includes analytical and problem-solving operations. Of all the subject areas, mathematics is now the one in which the United States is furthest along in the standards-setting process. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics has developed curriculum standards through an extensive iterative process with broad public input and professional review that has resulted in unprecedented consensus. These are gaining wide acceptance in education and in the public arena as a framework for the mathematics that schools should teach.

Defining standards for levels of student mathematics performance—what knowledge and skills students should master—still remains to be done. That process should build upon the important work under way in many states and countries.

Science

Given the fast pace of technological development, all students need a firm grasp of the concepts and thinking skills involved in science. Students can learn information about the world around them in a manner that also teaches them to reason and investigate scientifically.

With the support of the U.S. Department of Education, the National Academy of Sciences has recently started a major effort to develop world-class standards for what students should know and be able to do in science. Such promising work as

53

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

that of *Project 2061* of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), the NAEP science framework, the National Science Teachers Association's *Scope, Sequence and Coordination* projects, and several state science frameworks will form the basis of the consensus-building activity to be conducted by the National Academy of Sciences.

History

Understanding the past provides a context for understanding the present. The study of history is more than a superficial recognition of names and dates. It involves in-depth knowledge of the important people, ideas, events, and trends that have helped to shape the world. In addition to major political events, history includes such areas as social and economic developments over time, civics, art and music, and the history of ideas. The links between history and geography should be explicit and should demonstrate the roots of events in time and place. Knowledge of the history of other nations and their cultures broadens students' perspectives. A solid grasp of America's history teaches students an appreciation for both the diversity and the shared experiences and values that have given the United States its unique character.

Given the size and diversity of the country, it is difficult to craft a plan for history education that balances pluralism and common values. In California, a state with a very diverse population, the *History-Social Science Framework* has been widely acclaimed for scholarly integrity and multicultural perspective. The National Center for History in the Schools at UCLA has embarked on a two-year effort to develop world-class history standards with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the U.S. Department of Education.

Geography

Educated citizens need to understand their geographic setting in the world and that of other peoples. Geography, understood broadly, includes historical, political, social, economic, and physical interaction with the Earth and its environment.

What we now expect our students to know in geography is minimal when compared to what other developed nations expect of their students in this subject. There is substantial concern about the negative consequences this may have for our ability to market American goods and services in different parts of the world.

World-class standards should be developed in geography, broadly defined. The leadership of the National Geographic Society has provided impe-

tus for work on setting guidelines, designing new materials, and providing professional development opportunities for teachers. The *Guidelines for Geographic Education*, developed by the National Council for Geographic Education and the Association of American Geographers, would be worth examining in the course of setting standards for this subject.

TO MAKE NATIONAL STANDARDS MEANINGFUL, it is important that the nation be able to measure progress toward them. The Council recommends a system of multiple assessment linked to the national standards that will measure the progress of individuals, schools, districts, states, and the nation.

The system of assessments would have two major components: individual student assessments and assessments of representative samples of students from which inferences about the quality of programs or educational systems could be made. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is an example of a large-scale sample assessment. Both components would be aligned with the national standards.

In endorsing assessments to monitor individual and system progress toward the national education standards, the Council is advocating a system that will provide information for the following purposes:

- to exemplify for students, parents, and teachers the kinds and levels of achievement that should be expected;
- to improve classroom instruction and improve the learning outcomes for all students;
- to inform students, parents, and teachers about student progress toward the standards;
- to measure and hold students, schools, districts, states, and the nation accountable for educational performance; and
- to assist in education program decisions to be made by policy makers.

The Council notes that it is unlikely that all of these purposes can be accomplished with the same test or assessment instrument.

New student assessments will need to be developed by states, districts, commercial publishers, and others in order to measure student performance against the national content and performance standards. To facilitate the sound development of such new assessments, the Council recommends the following:

- New student assessments should incorporate the best thinking and sound research and development.
- States should work together in developing assessment instruments in order to use resources

effectively and to improve the quality of the assessments.

■ States and others should examine various approaches in designing student assessments of the national standards and also develop innovative methods of administration and improved procedures to report to their multiple audiences.

■ Different assessments may be developed for different curricula. There will be diverse interpretations of the content standards that lead to differing curricula and teaching practices.

■ High stakes should not be associated with the results of any assessment until the qualities of validity, reliability, and fairness have been addressed.

The Council finds, however, that the assessments eventually could be used for such high-stakes purposes for students as high school graduation, college admission, continuing education, or certification for employment. Assessments could also be used by states and localities as the basis for system accountability.

The Council recommends that the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) be reauthorized and assured funding to monitor the nation's and states' progress toward Goals 3 and 4 (calling for high levels of student achievement) of the National Educational Goals. NAEP is the national program begun in 1969 to biannually test representative samples of students in grades four, eight, and twelve in core subject areas and report achievement trends over time. As national standards are developed, there should be efforts to ensure that NAEP will be aligned with these standards.

Currently, a substantial amount of testing is conducted in schools. It is frequently said that American students are tested more than others in the world. Despite all the tests, surprisingly little useful information is available to students, parents, educators, and policymakers. Dissatisfaction with shortcomings in present practices has led to a rich variety of efforts to improve assessments. A national effort is needed to facilitate and coordinate these activities.

The new assessments should challenge all students and educators to do their best, open up new

Development and implementation of national standards and a system of assessments should be part of comprehensive educational reform.

opportunities for students, and provide real incentives to improve the quality of America's schools. There is significant interest in the promise of performance-based assessments, such as portfolios and projects, as ways of collecting evidence of what students know and can do. Such assessments frequently use open-ended tasks, focus on higher-order or complex thinking skills, require significant student time, and may allow students to choose among alternative tasks; some examine the performance of group activities. While important issues remain to be resolved, innovative techniques used by states and localities may be important elements in the mix of assessment instruments that will make up the new national system.

Important technical difficulties confront those developing such a new system of assessments. The Council deliberated on these complexities and recommends that special precautions be taken in the development process. First, any system must honor the traditions of local and state responsibility for education and, consequently, must provide flexibility and room for local adaptation. Second, there are difficulties

in producing assessments of high technical quality and fairness. Third, acknowledging that an assessment system of the scope imagined is a new enterprise for the nation, care must be taken to avoid the unintended and undesired effects of some testing practices, such as narrowing instruction and excluding certain students from assessments. Sufficient safeguards must be built into the system to protect students from negative consequences while the system of assessments is being refined, especially for students who have not been well served by testing in the past.

It will be technically difficult but essential to ensure that new assessments are valid, reliable, and fair. This requires ongoing reviews of the emerging assessments and their uses. Further, particularly for children who have historically experienced less success in school—such as the poor, ethnic minorities, and students with disabilities—opportunity to learn is a critical condition for valid and fair use of assessment results.

The development of a first-rate system of assessments will be an evolutionary, ongoing process. The Council finds the following activities

55

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

to be crucial in this effort:

■ *Quality assurance.* The Council recommends a quality assurance process to ensure that new student assessments are appropriate measures of the national standards and meet the technical considerations of validity, reliability, and fairness, particularly in conjunction with any high-stakes uses. Judgments of validity, reliability, and fairness depend in part upon how the results of the assessments are used.

■ *Quality guidelines for assessment development.* The Council recommends quality guidelines for the development and use of student assessments such as the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* and the criteria described by the National Forum on Assessment. Revised and additional guidelines may be needed as work progresses.

■ *Comparability.* The Council finds it essential that different assessments produce comparable results in attainment of the standards.

■ *Coherent and informative results.* One key objective of the assessment effort is to provide accurate information for students, parents, and teachers about the educational progress of individual students; another is to inform the public about the national achievement level. For students, parents, and teachers, the national system of assessments should provide information about an individual student's performance against national standards. States and localities should report results in the context of the conditions of learning and students' opportunities to learn.

■ *Independent reviews.* The Council recommends periodic, independent reviews of the assessment system to examine its impact, to ensure alignment with the national standards, and to ensure comparability of results.

■ *Better knowledge base.* The Council recommends continued research on developing, interpreting, and reporting assessments and ensuring test comparability.

■ *Cost effectiveness.* Detailed cost estimates for a new system of assessments are not available, but the Council recommends that assessments be cost effective. They should seek to build on current efforts at the state and local levels. The Council does not intend that the assessment system add to the net burden of testing, but rather that much current testing be replaced.

The Council finds precedents which indicate setting high standards and developing a quality system of assessments can raise student achievement. The Council advocates moving ahead to create high national standards and a voluntary system of assessments with careful and ongoing oversight of the process and its results.

PART THREE

How Are National Standards and a System of Assessments to be Developed and Implemented?

THE COUNCIL RECOMMENDS THAT A COORDINATING structure be put in place to advance standards-setting and assessment development. Development and implementation of national standards and a system of assessments should not take place in isolation but should be part of comprehensive educational reform. Indeed, the intellectual and political activities of setting high national standards and developing assessments are likely to provide added momentum for higher expectations and educational renewal.

The Council has agreed that the nation should move forward to set national education standards and develop a voluntary national system of assessments to help students and schools meet those standards. To ensure that this is done effectively, a coordinating structure needs to be agreed upon and put into place.

Principles

■ *Non-Federal.* To maintain the nation's tradition of state and local authority over education, any new oversight entity should be part of a cooperative national effort.

■ *Non-Duplication.* The process should benefit from and not attempt to duplicate work being done by existing entities.

■ *Broad-based.* The coordinating structure should be bipartisan, engage government at all levels, and involve the many constituencies that have an interest in improving education.

■ *Accountability.* The coordinating structure must nevertheless be accountable to the public. In addition to a public appointment process, appropriate constraints on rules of deliberation, reporting, and contracting can help provide such accountability.

■ *Timing.* Much good work has already begun and much more needs to be done soon. The coordinating structure should be in place quickly and act as a catalyst for progress rather than retard cur-

rent efforts.

A number of functions need to be performed to achieve the development of standards and assessments. They are described as follows:

Standards

- Coordinate the development of national standards.
- Develop an overarching statement.
- Develop content standards.
- Develop student performance standards.
- Develop school delivery standards.
- Develop system performance standards.
- Certify content and student performance standards as world class.

Assessments

- Coordinate the development of a system of assessments for individual students consistent with the national standards.
- Develop a program/system monitor consistent with national standards.
- Provide research and development for break-the-mold assessments.
- Issue guidelines for assessments.
- Ensure technical merit (validity, reliability, fairness).
- Certify assessments.
- Establish procedures and criteria for achieving comparability.

The National Education Goals Panel would be reconfigured to be politically balanced. Representation would include two members from the Administration; eight governors with three from the same political party as the President appointed by the chair or vice chair of the National Governors' Association, whichever represents the same political party, in consultation with each other; four members of Congress appointed by the majority and minority leaders of the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives. The role and function of the Panel would remain the same as set out in its charter. In addition, it will appoint members to a newly created body called the National Education Standards and Assessments Council, and it will certify standards and criteria for assessments.

Work on several of the functions identified above has already begun. For instance, professional groups in the five disciplines are developing national content standards with financial support from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement, the National Endowment for the Humanities, National Science Foundation, and other existing federal and non-federal agencies. The National Assessment of Educational Progress, with over-

sight by the National Assessment Governing Board, is developing assessments which would function as the program/system monitor; and the federal government is funding through the Office of Educational Research and Improvement important research and development for break-the-mold assessments. This work would continue and in fact would need to be augmented and accelerated. Other work, such as the school and system standards, would be developed by states working collectively through organizations like the National Governors' Association, the Education Commission of the States, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and state legislative organizations.

Nevertheless, a coordinating body is still needed to ensure the establishment of national education standards and a system of assessments. This body would be a catalyst and provide oversight and leadership. The body would establish guidelines for standards-setting and assessment development and general criteria to determine the appropriateness of standards and assessments recommended. This body would be the National Education Standards and Assessments Council (NESAC).

It is vital that there be strong public accountability in this work. For this reason, NESAC would be appointed by the Panel. Certification of content and student performance standards and criteria for assessments as world class shall be the joint responsibility of the Panel and NESAC. No certification will be issued by the Panel except after approval of NESAC and in the event the Panel denies certification to all or part of a NESAC proposal, all or part of that proposal shall be returned to NESAC with the reasons for denial.

It is desirable that Congress and the president codify the reconstituted Goals Panel and the National Education Standards and Assessments Council, consistent with the Panel's charter and this coordinating structure, and appropriate line-item funds for their operation to be administered through the U.S. Department of Education. However, the Goals Panel and NESAC would be allowed substantial latitude in their operation and would be as independent of the U.S. Congress, the U.S. Department of Education, and other federal agencies as permissible under federal law. The Panel and NESAC will each be able to hire staff, enter into contracts, make grants, receive funds both private and public, form committees, hire consultants and have gift authority.

To the extent practicable, the characteristic of these entities as voluntary partnerships committed to transforming American education by encourag-

57

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

ing the nation to strive for and achieve the National Education Goals and world-class standards would be maintained.

NESAC WOULD CONSIST OF 21 MEMBERS to include one-third public officials, one-third educators, and one-third members of the general public including consumers of education. The members would be appointed for three-year terms, with no individual serving more than six consecutive years. Officers would be elected for one-year terms. No person could serve on both the Goals Panel and NESAC.

Because NESAC will be making determinations and recommendations on the merit of standards and assessments, the appointment process must take potential conflict-of-interest considerations into careful account.

Nominations for positions on NESAC would be sought from the public, and from these nominations the Panel would make appointments according to the established categories. The Panel would establish initial terms for individuals of two, three or four years in order to establish a rotation in which one-third of the members are selected each year.

As vacancies arise on NESAC, the Panel would seek nominations from the public and the Panel would make the appropriate appointments.

National Standards and a System of Assessments as Parts of Comprehensive Educational Reform

Structures and processes not only have to be put in place to develop standards and assessments but are also needed to support their use by schools throughout the nation. Sound programs of instruction must be tied to standards and assessments. The Council recognizes that states, local communities, and schools set important policies that establish the context in which standards and assessments will operate. These include policies and practices regarding curriculum, professional development, school restructuring, and community and family supports. Such reforms should not be piecemeal. To be most effective, they must operate in an integrated fashion.

Comprehensive systemic reform should affect all elements of the education system. Families, educators, and policymakers must all work together. Their efforts at the school, district, state, and national levels should address four major dimensions of educational renewal: reforming schools, engaging families and communities, creating incentives for high performance, and providing equitable opportunities to achieve the new standards.

All children must have the opportunity to learn the material that new standards will indicate they should know. Improved instructional materials and instruction based on the standards are essential. Schools will need curriculum frameworks oriented to high levels of performance that are based on the national education standards.

New assessments should be designed to guide instruction and learning. What is expected should be clear enough that teachers can prepare students for the assessments and teachers should be able to use the results to revise and improve their teaching. Teachers must be active participants in the design of curricula and assessments tied to the standards.

High standards of achievement for all students will have implications for how America prepares, licenses, and certifies its teachers. To teach successfully to the new standards, teachers will need a deeper knowledge of subject matter and a better understanding of pedagogy. Substantial cooperation from universities, especially colleges of arts and sciences, in teacher preparation will be required. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards has embarked on an effort to set national, voluntary standards for experienced teachers that would promote quality instructional practices.

A comprehensive inservice professional development initiative is also essential in preparing teachers to help students attain the national education standards. States have a critical role in helping to make the most successful practices in professional development accessible to all personnel. Professional development must also be available to school and district administrators, who play key leadership roles in school reform.

Schools, school districts, and states should be encouraged to experiment with alternative strategies to help students achieve the new standards. New roles and responsibilities are likely to be necessary for success. Reforms that seek to make educators accountable also need to provide them with commensurate authority.

Education technology holds promise for helping students and schools achieve the standards and will be a basic requirement for education in the twenty-first century. Possibilities include distance learning that permits greater access for teachers and students to courses offered in different locations, and computer and video technologies for the delivery of enriched interactive learning. Teachers and principals in all schools will need professional development in educational technology. New technologies aligned to the standards and system of assessments may be included among the curriculum resources designed to achieve the standards.

58

*The Task
Before Us:
A QUEST
Reader*

The conditions of childhood are changing and some of the most significant changes have to do with characteristics of families. Helping families so that they may help students attain the high standards will require new strategies for coordinating the efforts of home and school.

Communities create the context in which schools and families function. Concerned communities value learning and provide necessary support to families so that learning can thrive. An important community service that is also supported by state and federal government is to provide the early childhood programs that help prepare children for school. The National Education Goals set objectives relating to nutrition and health care, access to preschools, and parent education. Programs have begun at the national, state, and local levels to foster coordination of family health care and social services.

National standards can clarify what a community can expect of its schools and help define a need for public action. Too frequently school reforms fall short of expectations because members of the public do not understand how they can play a constructive role in improving their schools. Efforts are needed to enhance local awareness of the need for change and to create shared understandings of educational problems and potential solutions.

Meeting high standards will entail comprehensive change, and the students, families, educators, and communities involved will need to have a reason to change. Currently, incentives for students and educators are overly focused on compliance with rules and regulations. They should be focused on attaining high performance. While intrinsic rewards such as love of learning are the best—and often primary—motivation, it is clear that external factors also play an important role in how hard both students and educators work. Rewards for success and constructive intervention in cases of persistent failure may be tied to student outcomes for both students and educators. Since learning requires the active participation of both, it would be unfair to focus incentives only on one or the other. Today, students not applying to highly selective colleges often fail to see a reason to enroll in demanding high school courses and to do

Teachers must be active participants in the design of curricula and assessments tied to the standards.

their best. All students should be provided incentives for meeting world-class standards. Incentives for educators should focus on improvement, including success in educating those students who have been least well served in the past.

Providing genuine opportunity for all students to achieve high standards is a national moral imperative. The standards that the Council proposes would apply to the entire education system. All students must have the opportunity to achieve them and to be assessed fairly on their attainment. To bring this about, equitable educational opportunities must be provided.

The Council recognizes the concerns of those who are fearful of the unintended consequences of its

proposals. Yet high standards and knowledge gained from appropriate assessments could serve as rallying points to secure the school and community efforts needed to reach them. High-quality standards and assessments should mobilize educators and the public to reform schools, engage families and communities, create incentives for high performance, and provide genuine opportunity for all students.

Raising Standards for American Education

The National Education Goals Panel has called upon America to become a nation of learners. National standards and assessments linked to them, developed through a broad consensus process, are a critical next step in revitalizing American education. To succeed, standards and assessments must be part of a fundamental reform of schools and school systems.

The move toward high standards will require mobilizing the entire country. Families, communities, schools, educators, employers, policymakers, and students have important roles to play in the comprehensive effort to fashion new standards and to see that they are attained.

The goal is ambitious and the stakes are high. Raising standards can transform what is taught and how instruction takes place. Raising standards can change the view of responsibilities in education. Raising standards can improve the quality of performance, not just in the classroom but on the job, in the marketplace, and in all aspects of American life.

59

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*





BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Reach High

*Building a movement
for excellence*

By John E. Jacob

WE ARE LOOKING AT A SITUATION that may be the most perilous in our history. The world is charging ahead to the twenty-first century. The high-performance new world we are entering requires more than technological skills. It requires self-confident mastery of knowledge and life-long development and learning. In such a world, what you know and how you perform will be more important than class and race.

Are we ready for that world? Some of us are. But far too many of us are not. Four hundred years of racial oppression have taken their toll. Four hundred years of being told we are inferior have settled into too many of our souls.

Many years ago, the great African-American historian Carter G. Woodson put it this way:

When you control a man's thinking, you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him to stand here or go yonder. He will find his "proper place" and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back

door. In fact, if there is no back door, he will cut one for his special benefit. His education makes it necessary.

Isn't that what we see when some of us give up and retreat into drugs and crime, when some of our young people see academic achievement as a "white thing" and failure as a "black thing," when some of us don't take the risks necessary to get ahead because we think the system or "The Man" will stop us.

Some of us have risen above that racist garbage. We have rejected it completely. We have demonstrated that black excellence is widespread even in a society governed by negative racist stereotypes. But many others of us are joined in a demoralized community of despair instead of a renewed community of resolve.

The pervasive sense of hopelessness and helplessness in so many of our communities requires a radical regeneration of the way we think and act. It requires that we expose the Big Lie of black inferiority. It requires that we confront the institutions in our society and demand that they get rid of the negative stereotyping that holds us back. It requires that we challenge those who hold us to the lower standards and lower expectations that reinforce those stereotypes. But most of all it requires that all African-Americans take control of their own lives and develop their individual potential to the fullest

61

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

John E. Jacob is the president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League, Inc. This article is excerpted from Mr. Jacob's keynote speech to the national conference of the Urban League. It appeared in the Winter 1992 issue of American Educator, the professional journal of the American Federation of Teachers.

while marshalling our resources as a community.

We've done it before. We are the people who created a civil rights revolution that swept the world. People who had been brutalized and stripped of their basic rights woke up and demanded those rights. They shook off hundreds of years of racist propaganda to demonstrate their moral superiority and their ability to come together as a people behind a vision of a new future.

We need to recapture the spirit that led those proud African-Americans of barely a generation ago to stand up for a goal that was right, to risk their jobs and their lives to secure that goal, to come together as a community to direct their scarce resources to achieve that goal.

What was done in the past can be done in the future.

In the 1990s, we need to build a movement for excellence that reaches into every black community and every black home. We need to recognize that our very existence as a people is on the line in the new, challenging world that's being born. We need to ensure the continuous development of African-Americans as a self-confident people whose effective efforts can change our lives and our nation. And we must begin with our children.

In the 1990s, we need to build a movement dedicated to the development of African-American children. We must commit ourselves, our resources, and our lives to developing our children into twenty-first century citizens. Yes, the same children who are bombarded with messages of racial inferiority, who are too often shunted into special education classes, the same children who are prepared for lifetimes of failure—yes, those same children can be helped to excel and to lead the rest of the nation into a bold new future.

That's not a fantasy. It is a realistic goal. Our children are as capable of learning and of developing their talents as any in the world.

If America could take immigrant peasants from the backwaters of Europe and mold them into a peo-

We must challenge those who hold us to the lower standards and lower expectations that reinforce those stereotypes.

ple that led the world; if Japan, Korea, and Taiwan could take people racked by poverty and devastated by war and mold them into a global economic powerhouse in one generation; then a committed, dedicated African-American community can help its children develop into the most intelligent and skilled people on the face of the earth.

If we believe we can do it, and if we direct effective efforts toward that goal, then *we will do it*. The time to begin is *now*.

What will it take for our children to develop into outstanding twenty-first century citizens? Let me suggest four basic criteria based on what we know of the challenging demands of the future:

- Every African-American child should graduate from high school with the ability to do calculus;
- Every African-American child should be fluent in a foreign language;
- Every African-American child should be able to research, organize, and write a twenty-five-page essay on a challenging topic;
- Every African-American child should live by strict, high ethical standards.

That's what it will take to make it in the twenty-first century—not just for African-Americans, but for all of America's people. And let me be very clear. We already have all the power, all the resources, and all the laws—right now—to create an America that can produce twenty-first century children. But right now, our society is on a downhill course because it refuses to develop its children—*all* of them. It still thinks that it can get away with categorizing and stereotyping children—with developing a small white elite and writing off African-American children. That won't work any more. It's a prescription for suicide in the world of the twenty-first century.

So we have to pioneer an alternative way. We have to show that a community can take charge of its own destiny and nurture success in its children—all of them. We can demonstrate that black children can meet the highest standards of excellence, and by doing so, we will show the rest of the world how to develop human capabilities.

62

*The Task
Before Us:
A QuEST
Reader*





BEST COPY AVAILABLE



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Reading: Seeing the Big Picture

By John T. Bruer

CHARLES IS IN THE SEVENTH GRADE. He has an IQ of 70 and reads at the third-grade level. He has had several years of remedial reading instruction in a public school, but seems to make little progress. Charles has sufficient decoding skills to read aloud, but has almost no comprehension of what he reads. He is representative of many students who will fail—students whom our educational system can't reach.

Teachers report that they often see students who are unable to comprehend written language. What is odd is that these children can tell stories and have no trouble understanding spoken language. Sometimes they can even read aloud, but still have difficulty understanding what they have read. Obviously, standard reading instruction has failed these students in a fundamental way.

On the first day of a new remedial reading program, the teacher asked Charles to read a short passage about reptiles. To see if he understood the

passage, the teacher asked him to formulate a question based on the passage, a question that might appear on a test. Although he tried, he couldn't think of a question and gave up. He had not understood and retained enough of what he had just read to frame a question about it.

After fifteen days in the new remedial program, the teacher and Charles repeated this exercise. After Charles had read a passage about Antarctic research, he immediately offered the question, "Why do scientists come to the South Pole to study?" By this time he also had raised his comprehension scores on the reading passages from 40 to 75 percent, an average performance level for a seventh-grader. On comprehension tests given in his regular classroom, he improved from the 25th to the 78th percentile in social science and from the 5th to the 69th percentile in science. At the end of the twenty-day program he had gained twenty months on standardized reading comprehension tests, and he maintained this improvement long after his remedial instruction ended.

Charles was the beneficiary of *reciprocal teaching*, a method that applies results of cognitive research to reading instruction.

Students like Charles puzzle teachers in part because teachers are skilled readers. It is hard for a skilled reader to understand how there can be such

65

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

John T. Bruer is the president of the James S. McDonnell Foundation. "Reading: Seeing the Big Picture" is taken from Schools for Thought: A Science of Learning in the Classroom, copyright © 1993 Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and is reprinted with the permission of MIT Press.

students at all. For teachers and other skilled readers, reading is effortless. Most of us can easily read three hundred words per minute, five words every second. Given how reading appears or feels to us experts, we can't imagine what it is like for Charles. If we read a sentence like this one aloud (or even silently), we can't help but understand it, just as we can't help but understand any sentence of our language we say aloud. Charles is saying sentences of his language aloud, why can't he understand them, as we do?

The answer is that we bring more skills to the task than Charles, and as expert readers we are hardly aware of it. To understand spoken language requires language-comprehension skills. To understand written language—to read—requires decoding (word-recognition) skills *plus* language-comprehension skills. There is more to reading than being able to say the words aloud or being able to say them silently to oneself—there is more to it than decoding. Expert readers automatically and simultaneously apply both sets of skills in reading. Charles, on the other hand, has decoding skills, but either he lacks language-comprehension skills or he is unable to apply them while he reads.

To help students such as Charles, we have to look beyond how reading feels to us and beyond the teaching of isolated subskills—even important ones, such as decoding. As one educator told me, "We have to see reading in the big picture." Reciprocal teaching is an example of how children can benefit if we take this larger view. It helps children apply their language-comprehension skills to written language.

Cognitive Models of Skilled Reading

Reading, although effortless for most of us, is a complex and demanding cognitive task. To teach reading effectively—to understand and remedy the difficulties Charles has—we have to appreciate its complexity. As Marcel Just and Patricia Carpenter (1987, p. 3) observe, "What we sometimes fail to appreciate is that skilled reading is an intellectual feat no less complex than chess playing." What is surprising is that so many people learn to execute this daunting intellectual feat. If we want to understand how to teach reading more effectively, we must understand what makes it so daunting.

Cognitive psychologists have developed models of skilled reading that spell out the task's complexity. These models can help us see reading in the big picture and understand why it can be difficult (Just and Carpenter 1987; Rayner and Pollatsek 1989). Like other cognitive models, they describe in some detail reading's component skills; more

important, however, they also describe how those skills interact to result in fluent reading. Although reading is much more complicated than solving balance-scale problems, scientists' knowledge of it is sufficiently detailed that they can write production-system programs that simulate skilled reading.

When they study reading, cognitive scientists have a unique source of data for developing and testing their models: eye movements. Contrary to how it seems to us, when we read our eyes don't move smoothly and continuously across the page; rather, they pause on a word, quickly jump to another, and then pause again. Psychologists call the pauses *fixations* and the jumps *saccades*. Sometimes our eyes jump backward rather than forward in the text. Researchers call the backward jumps *regressions*. Reading is like a very fast slide show, with approximately four slides per second and with an occasional backtrack to a previously viewed slide. Our mental processing integrates the slides into what appears to be a smooth, continuous motion picture.

Psychologists use a computer-controlled device called an *eye tracker* to make precise measurements of eye movements. By measuring the reflection of a beam of infrared light (invisible to humans) off a subject's cornea, the tracker can compute precisely and continuously where the subject is fixating, how long each fixation lasts, and the direction and speed of saccades.

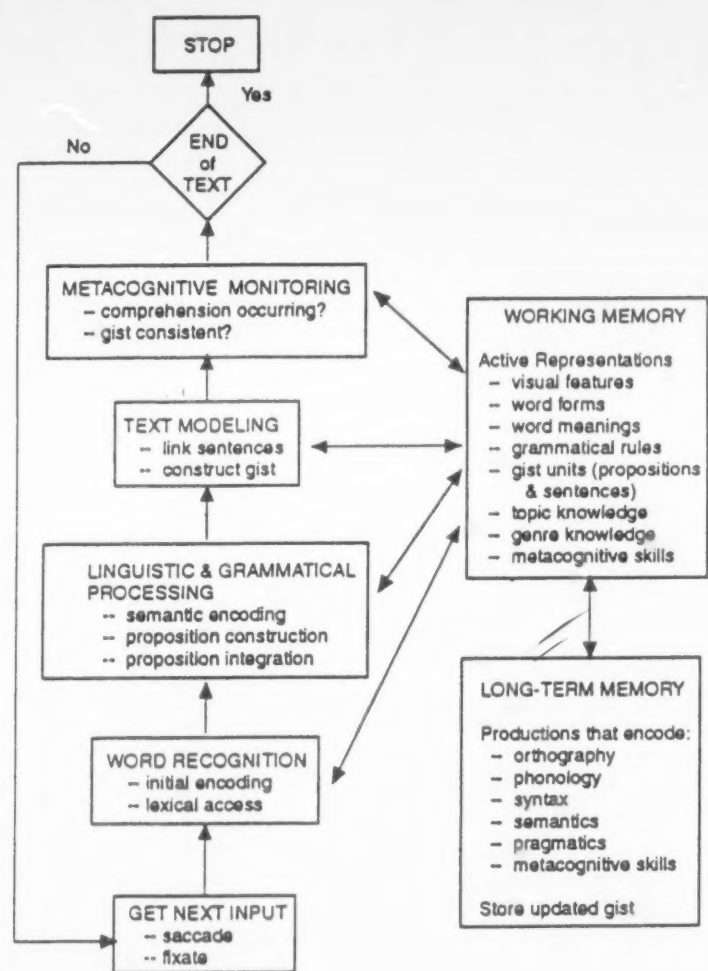
Using eye trackers, psychologists have discovered that for skilled readers an average fixation lasts 250 milliseconds (msec), or a quarter of a second. Skilled readers fixate around 80 percent of content words (nouns, verbs, and modifiers) and around 40 percent of function words (articles, conjunctions, and prepositions). Fixations consume 90 to 95 percent of reading time. A saccade takes 15 to 20 msec. Most saccades are forward (left to right when reading English), but 10 to 15 percent of saccades are regressions to previously fixated material. These experiments have also shown that we take in information from the text only during fixations; we take in no new information during a saccade (Just and Carpenter 1987).

Psychologists exploit this quirk of our visual system to test hypotheses about what controls and regulates eye movements in reading. A saccade takes at least 15 msec, but the display on the eye tracker's computer screen can be changed in only 5 msec. If the experimenter alters the text in the display during a saccade, the subject is oblivious to the change. Thus, psychologists can change the display during a saccade—change the number of letters visible around the fixation point, control how long the fixated material is visible, change

66

The Task
Before Us:
A QuEST
Reader

FIGURE 1



A sketch of a cognitive model for skilled reading. A skilled reader relies on knowledge stored in long-term memory to construct meaning from text and is able to control numerous representations that must be active in working memory. The flow chart on the left indicates the representations and levels of processing involved during each fixation. An average fixation lasts 250 msec.

state is the printed marks on a page. The goal is to construct a meaning from the marks and store the meaning in long-term memory for later use. The problem-solving operators are the skills and knowledge we have to transform the marks into meanings. These operators include knowledge about word forms, word meanings, grammatical rules, topics, and literary forms. All this knowledge is stored in long-term memory. The information processing occurs in working memory, where these operators get their input and leave their input. To read fluently, we have to represent and process massive amounts of information rapidly and at a variety of levels—visual, lexical, grammatical, conceptual, and metacognitive. Reading places huge demands on working memory's limited capacity.

The flow chart at the left side of Figure 1 shows the processes triggered on each eye fixation. On each fixation, a reader processes the new information at the visual, lexical, grammatical, conceptual, and textual levels and stores an interpretation of the text up to that point in long-

term memory. The process stops when there is no more text to process. Skilled readers, being metacognitively aware, monitor the processing to be sure that their interpretation is consistent and that they are comprehending the text.

One Loop Through the Cycle

A closer look at the various processes and subprocesses shown in the flow chart in Figure 1 will help us appreciate why, in the big picture, skilled reading is an intellectual feat on a par with expertise in chess.

Starting at the bottom, the reader fixates new

67

American Federation of Teachers: A QuEST Reader

spellings and words, alter grammatical constructions—and see how any such change affects subjects' eye movements, reading speed, and comprehension. If researchers design these manipulations cleverly, on the basis of task analysis of the reading process, they can discover how cognitive processes at various levels—perceptual, word, sentence, text—contribute to skilled reading. In reading research, eye movements give researchers a "window on the mind."

Looking through this window, researchers have developed models like the one sketched in Figure 1. Reading, for the cognitive scientist, is another kind of problem solving. The problem's initial

material, which serves as input for the word-recognition process. Word recognition consists of two subprocesses: *initial encoding* and *lexical access*. In initial encoding the reader encodes the string of printed letters into a visual representation. Next, in lexical access, the reader matches the visual representation with word patterns stored in a part of long-term memory called the *lexicon*. The lexicon is the reader's mental dictionary, containing information that associates word forms with their possible meanings and their grammatical parts of speech in the reader's language. In lexical access, the reader checks to see if the visual representation matches a word form in his or her language. If a match is found, word recognition ends. Word recognition is a visual or perceptual skill, and it is the *only* process in the model that is unique to reading. We use all the other processes—linguistic and grammatical processing, text modeling, and metacognitive monitoring—for both reading and speech comprehension.

A fundamental skill for understanding language is knowing what words *mean*. The end result of word recognition is that the reader associates a letter string with an *entry* in the lexicon. Like a word in a dictionary, a single letter string in the lexicon may have several different meanings associated with it. If the meaning of a word is ambiguous, the reader must choose from among possible meanings the one best suited to the current context. Researchers call this process of choosing a meaning *semantic encoding*.

In the case of simple, well-written sentences in which the reader knows the meanings of the words, semantic encoding is an effortless, unconscious process. When ambiguities arise, skilled readers realize something is amiss and their eye movements change to find information that might resolve the ambiguity. Here is a striking, although contrived, example: "Tomorrow was the annual, one-day fishing contest and fishermen would invade the place. Some of the best bass guitarists in the country would come to this spot." (Beck and Carpenter 1986, p. 1099) After reading the first sentence, a reader assumes that the text is about fishing. This assumption influences subsequent semantic encoding. Eye movements proceed smoothly forward to "bass," which the reader semantically encodes as a kind of fish. Trouble starts when the reader fixates "guitarists." The original encoding of "bass" as a species of fish doesn't make sense as a modifier for "guitarists." The reader's interpretation is no longer consistent. Eye movements slow and the pattern of saccades changes as the reader searches for information with which to resolve the inconsistency—information that results in the re-encoding of the letter

string "bass" in its musical meaning.

Once the appropriate meanings (including the grammatical parts of speech) of individual words are available, the reader can begin to combine them into longer meaning units. Here the reader uses grammatical knowledge to construct *propositions* or clauses. Propositions are simple meaning structures that attribute a state or an action (usually named by a verb) to an agent or an object (usually named by a noun). One simple written sentence can contain many propositions. "John hit the red ball" contains at least four propositions: John exists; a ball exists; the ball is red; John hit it. Once the reader has constructed these propositions, he or she then *integrates* them into even larger meaning units: sentences. For skilled readers who are reading well-written texts, proposition construction and integration is again largely effortless.

We become aware of processing at this level only when a text is poorly written or grammatically ambiguous—for example, "The conductor stood before the audience left the concert hall" (Just and Carpenter 1987, p. 146). The problem with this trick sentence is that "before" can be either a preposition or a conjunction. When processing this sentence, a reader generally assumes that "before" is a preposition and that he is processing a single grammatical sentence. When "left"—a second verb—appears, the reader realizes that there are two grammatical sentences to process and reinterprets "before" as a conjunction linking the two sentences. The grammatical ambiguity makes proposition integration difficult.

In the next process, *text modeling*, a reader integrates and links the information contained in individual sentences to build a mental representation of the whole text. The result of text modeling—the end product of reading comprehension—is a mental representation of the text's general meaning, or its *gist*, which the reader stores in long-term memory. As a reader takes in new information from the page, he continually modifies and updates the text model and stores the gist.

Up to this point the reading process depends primarily on information encoded in the text. Text modeling is different. It depends not only on information encoded on the page but also on the reader's stored background knowledge about the text's topic. Imagine that a Harvard classics professor and a farmer with only a high school education both read an article on crop rotation. Who would read it faster? Who would understand it better? Who would remember more of it? The professor would fare poorly in this comparison, not because he is a poor reader, but because he lacks the background knowledge that helps the

68

The Task
Before Us:
A QuEST
Reader

farmer construct the gist. Chapter 2 of Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy* (1987) spells out in some detail the importance of background knowledge in reading comprehension.

We need background knowledge in reading for at least two reasons.

First, background knowledge helps us make inferential links among the sentences that are written on the page. For example, consider these sentences: "The radio suddenly started playing. The noise frightened the infant." (Just and Carpenter 1987, p. 252) Based on what we know about radios, noise, and babies, we infer that "the noise" refers to the radio playing and infer that the radio was playing sufficiently loud to startle the baby. The two sentences say neither of these things explicitly. We make the inferences—we derive information that goes beyond what is literally on the page—by using our general knowledge about the world in an attempt to link the two sentences into a meaningful story. We make dozens of such inferences every time we read a paragraph. Without background knowledge to warrant these inferences, reading comprehension would be impossible.

Second, we need background knowledge to construct and retain a text's gist. Given how our long-term memory works, to understand and remember what we read we have to relate the new information to schemas already in long-term memory. When appropriate background knowledge isn't active or available, we can remember very little of what we read. Try the following experiment, originally performed by John Bransford and Marcia Johnson (1972). Read this passage once, close the book, and write down as much as you can remember:

The procedure is actually quite simple. First you arrange things into different groups. Of course, one pile may be sufficient depending on how much there is to do. If you have to go somewhere else, due to lack of facilities that is the next step, otherwise you are pretty well set. It is important not to overdo things. That is, it is better to do a few things at once than too many.

Despite knowing all the words in this grammatically adequate text, you probably understood it poorly, if at all, and could recall very little about the passage. Getting the gist was so hard that you probably read the passage slowly, using long fixations and many regressions. However, if I had given you the same passage with the title "Washing Clothes" you would have read the passage more quickly and remembered it better. The title would have activated your clothes-washing schema, and you would have used that schema as background knowledge to construct a text model

that would have aided your comprehension and enhanced your retention.

Besides background knowledge about topics, skilled readers also have background knowledge about literary forms and genres. Different literary forms and genres present different kinds of comprehension problems and require different strategies and assumptions. We read Beatrix Potter's *Peter Rabbit* with a different set of background assumptions than we bring to Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*. (For example, we would be very surprised if the animals spoke in the second work.) When we read the front page of the *New York Times* we expect the language used there to be, for the most part, literal. In contrast, when we read poetry we expect language to be used figuratively.

For the adept, when things are going well, reading is highly automatic and requires little conscious mental effort. Skilled readers spend a lot of time on automatic pilot, and that is why reading appears to be so effortless most of the time. However, when ambiguities arise or when the gist becomes muddled or inconsistent, skilled readers *know* that their comprehension is failing and can take steps to identify and solve the problem. Skilled readers monitor the comprehension process. They apply metacognitive skills to their reading. They know to ask the following self-critical questions: Is my comprehension strategy working? How am I doing? Does my gist make sense?

Some children develop these metacognitive skills on their own, but some don't. Remember, too, that it is metacognitive skills that often distinguish strong from weak learners. Some students (such as Charles, mentioned at the start of this chapter) lack these metacognitive skills, or cannot apply them to reading comprehension. Rarely does reading instruction explicitly teach these skills to students.

Cognitive Models and Reading Instruction

The previous section described the main processes that occur on one pass through the flow chart in Figure 1. The purpose of that extended (and at times abstract) discussion was to illustrate and reinforce the notion that reading is a complex, multi-level process. Yet that discussion oversimplified the reading process in at least two ways.

First, timing and speed were not mentioned. Research tells us that fluent readers initiate a new cycle through the flow chart, on average, four times per second. In 250 msec, readers take in new information and do all the processing necessary at various levels—visual, linguistic, textual, and metacognitive—to integrate the new information

69

American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader

into the gist they are constructing. This is a remarkable cognitive achievement.

Second, the above description was strictly "bottom-up," describing how the processes work in sequence from word recognition through metacognitive monitoring. Research also shows that reading is not a serial, bottom-up process from printed page to gist. There are also top-down influences, with processes at the higher levels influencing those lower down. One of the most robust examples of this is called the *word-superiority effect*. Obviously, to recognize words we have to recognize their constituent letters. However, when experimenters briefly present subjects with stimuli such as "lint" and "tinl" and then ask them whether an i or an e occurred at the second position in a stimulus, the subjects choose the correct letter more often if it appeared as part of a word than if it was part of a nonword. That is, subjects see a letter in a word better than they see the same letter in a nonword. Psychologists interpret this as showing that higher-level word knowledge facilitates lower-level letter perception. Knowledge of word forms exerts a top-down influence on letter perception. We don't necessarily process information at the letter level and only then process it at the word level. There is interaction between the processing at these two levels.

We saw a second example of top-down effect and interaction in the "bass" example. There, text modeling of the first sentence generated an assumption that the passage was about fishing. This assumption exerted a top-down influence on semantic encoding, so that the reader initially assigned an incorrect meaning to "bass."

Researchers have found such interactions among nearly all the processing levels in the cognitive model. This has implications for reading instruction. Reading is complex because various levels of information processing are needed, because the processing must be executed rapidly, and because the processes are highly interactive. The skills sketched in the model must work together, sometimes nearly simultaneously, for the reader to construct meaning from text. If children are to use these skills together and interactively, they should learn them together and learn to use them interactively. The models tell us, then, that teaching the component skills in bottom-up fashion, in isolation, and one after another may not be effective. Appreciating this aspect of reading's complexity amounts to seeing reading in the big picture and can help us teach reading better. Principles derived from the cognitive models can also help us design better texts to help children both learn to read and read to learn.

Explaining the Whys

Isabel Beck, of the Learning Research and Development Center, is a former classroom teacher turned educational researcher. While following her husband's military and academic career wanderings, she taught in the Pittsburgh, San Diego, and Durham public schools. In Europe, she worked at U.S. Army bases, teaching typing to paratroopers and preparing non-commissioned officers for their exams on the finer points of fox-holes and barbed wire.

When Beck and her husband returned to Pittsburgh, she took time off to have two children and then earned a master's degree in education. She decided to go to law school, but to fill the time until her legal studies were to begin she answered an LRDC advertisement to be a research assistant on a reading project for a year.

"What first got my attention was that here were people, cognitive psychologists, who had *not* taught kids to read, yet they were able to describe accurately phenomena that I had observed in the course of teaching reading, but phenomena they had not experienced first hand," Beck recalls. "How could they know? I didn't understand how they could be as smart about reading and learning as I was when they didn't have the experiences I had."

More surprising, Beck realized that their explanations for the phenomena were sometimes better than hers: "I had viewed myself as a good teacher, and as I look back I still think I was, but I could have been better. While I couldn't have worked harder or gone any more extra miles, I could have understood the whys of what I was doing. Cognitive psychology explains the whys, and I became convinced that if practitioners understood the whys their teaching would be enhanced." She declined her acceptance into law school and remained at the LRDC to study word recognition, vocabulary learning, and reading comprehension. She completed her Ph.D. and now works to explain the whys to teachers in ways that are relevant to their classroom experiences.

Word Recognition: Accuracy Plus Speed

Beck remembers one particular incident that contributed to her conversion from a would-be lawyer to an educational psychologist. As a teacher she had noticed that in the primary grades weak readers did not do flash-card drills involving words with the same "confidence" as better readers. They could read most of the words correctly, but they were more hesitant. Beck would tell them

70

The Task
Before Us:
A QuEST
Reader

"You're doing fine, have more confidence," but her encouragement had little effect. Then one day she went to an LRDC colloquium, given by Charles Perfetti, on the automaticity of low-level cognitive processes. The colloquium occurred at a time when researchers were beginning to apply cognitive science to reading. They knew that reading demands the coordination and the almost instantaneous interaction of visual, linguistic, and higher comprehension skills. They also knew that limits on working memory could be circumvented if some of the skills were automatic. A cognitive process is *automatic* if we are unaware that the process is taking place, if it occurs outside our conscious control, and if it requires minimal working-memory capacity. Automatic processes are fast, accurate, and nearly effortless.

Automaticity is an important cognitive phenomenon that enables us to learn and execute tasks that might otherwise be impossible. Automatic processing, like chunking, helps us conserve our limited working-memory capacity. We can overlearn a cognitive skill to the point where it becomes almost like a reflex—automatic. When this happens we no longer think about executing the skill, we just do it. Such a skill takes little, if any, working-memory capacity. Automaticity allows us to execute some overlearned skills in parallel with other tasks that do demand conscious effort. We can perform the automatic skill while simultaneously using working memory to do something else. Motor skills are familiar examples of automatic processes. When we learn golf or tennis, we go through a period of talking ourselves through every stroke. After much practice, the strokes become automatic; this frees our cognitive resources to think, or worry, about the finer (tactical and strategic) points of the game.

What Beck learned at the colloquium was that for skilled readers word recognition is an automatic process. "The light bulb went on. What I had mistaken as lack of confidence was lack of automaticity," she recounts. Though her students had all been fairly *accurate* on word drills, her poor readers had been *slow* on them. For those students, word recognition was not automatic.

How can psychologists show that word recognition is automatic? How can they prove that a process occurs if their experimental subjects are entirely unaware of it, as the definition of automaticity says? If a word appears on a computer screen for only 20 msec, a skilled reader can't see the word and if asked whether a word appeared, can only guess. Yet after only 20 msec word recognition has occurred. How do psychologists know?

Like other long-term memory structures, the lexicon—the mental dictionary—has an associa-

tive node-link structure, in which the nodes are meaning features and the links are meaning relations. The schema for general animal knowledge illustrates how part of the lexicon might be organized. In such an associative memory structure, if we access one word we also activate nearby related words in the associative network. If after flashing "robin" for 20 msec the experimenter waits 500 msec and then asks the reader to decide whether two other letter strings (say, "canary" and "truck") are words, the reader identifies "canary" as a word much more quickly than "truck." The reader can do this because the invisible letter string "robin" activated the related "canary" but not the distant "truck" in the lexicon. Apparently, in 20 msec the reader unconsciously looked up the meaning of "robin" in the lexicon. That is to say, lexical access occurred. If lexical access is the *final* step in word recognition, then word recognition occurred even though the reader was unaware of it.

A phenomenon called the Stroop effect shows that word recognition is like a reflex; it occurs outside our conscious control. If we are shown the color name "red" printed in green ink and asked to name the color of the ink, our reaction time is much longer than the time we take to say "green" when shown a green color patch. Even with practice, our reaction times on this task improve only slightly if at all. The problem is that the letter string "red" activates the meaning of that word in the lexicon and interferes with naming the color of the ink. No matter how hard we try, the meaning of "red" interferes with the name of the color, green. If you try the task, you can feel the interference. Hence, word recognition occurs even when we try hard to suppress it.

Although it is difficult to prove that word recognition takes *no* working-memory capacity, data suggest that it takes very little. Using an eye tracker, Keith Rayner and his colleagues had subjects read text in an experiment where the portion of text fixated appeared for only 20 msec after the start of the fixation; words were visible for, at most, 50 msec of a 250-msec fixation (Rayner et al. 1981; Rayner and Pollatsek 1981). Under these conditions subjects' reading speeds decreased only slightly, and their pattern of eye movements was no different than under normal reading conditions. The visual information readers take from the page in the first 50 msec of a fixation is enough to allow normal reading. If we assume that processing *time* is proportional to processing *demands*, then word recognition places little demand on working-memory capacity—at most, only 20 percent (50/250 msec) of the processing demands.

Thus, for skilled readers, word recognition sat-

ifies all three criteria for being an automatic process.

Automaticity and the Great Debate

How important is automaticity—both speed and accuracy—of word recognition in learning to read? How does automaticity of word recognition contribute to the development of other reading skills? In the early 1980s an LRDC research group including Alan Lesgold, Lauren Resnick, Kathleen Hammond, and Mary Curtis was studying these questions. (See Lesgold et al. 1985.)

The research team wanted to find out the order in which children acquire various reading skills. Everyone accepted that improved word recognition is associated with improved reading, but does better word recognition *cause* better reading or does word recognition develop simultaneously with other reading skills? If improved word recognition causes other reading skills to improve, the improvement in word recognition should precede improvement on the other skills. If so, word-recognition ability in the early grades should predict later reading-comprehension scores.

The research team studied children in grades 1-4 over a four-year period to assess the development of their skills. The researchers measured both accuracy and speed of word recognition by having the children pronounce words as quickly as possible when the words appeared one by one on a computer screen. They found that a first-grader's accuracy and speed on this task was an excellent predictor of the child's reading-comprehension scores in fourth grade. They also found that word-recognition *speed* was a much better predictor of later reading comprehension than accuracy alone. In short, they found that early automaticity of word recognition—speed plus accuracy—precedes, predicts, and so most likely causes subsequent improvement in other reading skills. Beck's students who had appeared to lack confidence actually lacked automaticity, and so their chances of becoming expert readers were slim.

The study's findings also had implications for the "great debate" in reading instruction between advocates of phonics and whole-word instruction, a debate about the most efficient way to teach word recognition (Chall 1983; Beck 1981).

Phonics instruction assumes that the alphabetic principle is fundamental in learning to read. In alphabetic languages, such as English, readers have to associate meaningless written symbols (the letters) with equally meaningless sounds. Only after readers make the symbol-sound associations and combine the sounds do meaningful words

emerge. Learning the appropriate associations between letters and sounds at the subword level, phonics advocates argue, allows children to become *productive* readers. By this they mean that children can sound out new words they have never seen before.

Whole-word instruction takes meaning and comprehension as fundamental. Its advocates argue that if the purpose of reading is to construct meaning, and if meaning first appears at the word level, then instruction should emphasize the word level. We should teach children new words in story contexts and have them use the words repeatedly in sentences and other drills until they can recognize the words independently. Emphasizing phonetic decoding at the meaningless subword level, whole-word theorists argue, can make children "word callers" rather than "word comprehenders."

The LRDC study included both phonics and whole-word classrooms. In the phonics classrooms, at the time of the study, teachers tested children on word recognition entirely on the basis of accuracy. Children could take as long as they needed to sound out individual words. In the phonics classes, about 15 percent of the children progressed through elementary instruction without developing automatic word-recognition skills. Surprisingly, about 15 percent of the children in the whole-word classes had the same problem. The two methods, as used in the early 1980s, were about equally deficient in making word recognition automatic for some children.

In both types of classroom, a sizable percentage of children were leaving the primary grades with grossly inadequate word-recognition skills and at risk for later reading problems. Cognitive theory suggests that, to comprehend a text, a reader must process information rapidly at the word, phrase, sentence, and text levels. All the processing has to occur within the limitations of working-memory capacity. If word recognition is not automatic and consumes most of the reader's cognitive capacity, then the processing resources that remain are not sufficient for the development and deployment of other comprehension skills. Children who can't recognize words automatically can get permanently stuck at the decoding level and may never realize or learn that the goal of reading is to construct meaning. In the LRDC study, a substantial percentage of both phonics and whole-word students read so slowly—50 to 70 words per minute—that they could not comprehend even the easiest material. Although the "great debate" was heated at the time, both sides were paying insufficient attention to the importance of automaticity in word recognition.

72

*The Task
Before Us:
A QuEST
Reader*

sufficient vocabulary knowledge and comprehension skills to establish the context. This implies that the larger the reader's prior vocabulary, the easier it is for him to learn new words from context. There is a feedback loop between what one already knows and how easily one can learn more. The sociologist Robert K. Merton (1968) called loops such as these the Matthew Effect, after the author who might have been first to state it, Matthew the Evangelist: "For unto every one that has shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that has not shall be taken away even that which he has." If the Matthew Effect applies to the learning of vocabulary, then investing in early and consistent vocabulary instruction should, like compound interest, pay long-term dividends for reading comprehension.

Although vocabulary knowledge correlates with reading comprehension, and although the teaching of vocabulary can improve performance on vocabulary tests, teaching vocabulary often fails to improve comprehension—often because vocabulary is taught without regard for the big picture. In the mid 1970s, Beck and Margaret McKeown began what was to become a long-term research collaboration by applying cognitive science to the problems of vocabulary instruction. (See Beck, Perfetti, and McKeown 1982; Beck, McKeown, and Omanson 1987.)

One common method of teaching vocabulary is the *dictionary method*, in which students memorize meanings of words and generate sample sentences using them. This method is the least successful in improving reading comprehension. It also can result in children's using sentences like "My family erodes a lot," intending to say the family eats out a lot (Miller and Gildea 1987). It teaches vocabulary knowledge largely in isolation from using that knowledge in reading and language comprehension.

Using cognitive principles, Beck, McKeown, and their colleagues reasoned that to affect comprehension, word knowledge must be accurate and efficient (that is, automatic), tightly woven into readers' lexicons, and taught in the context of language-comprehension activities. Maybe unsuccessful vocabulary instruction ignored automaticity, didn't build rich associations among word meanings in long-term memory, and didn't teach children how to use this knowledge.

Beck and her collaborators began work with fourth-graders in a city school, 80 percent of whom were below the 50th percentile in standardized reading and vocabulary scores. The research team developed an experimental vocabulary program based on four assumptions: Training in word use must be broad. Students must actively process

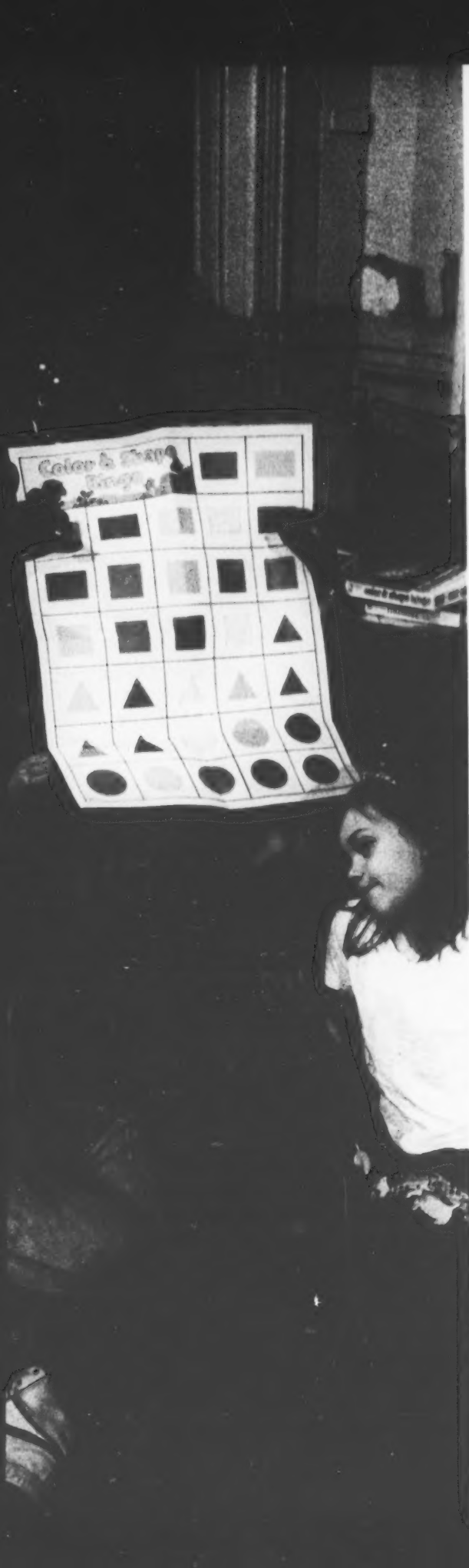
the words. Students must practice extensively with the words. Students must have multiple exposure to the words in different contexts.

Instruction took place thirty minutes a day, five days a week. Instead of learning unrelated words one by one, each week the students worked on a group of eight to ten words in a single meaning family. For example, the "people family" of words included "accomplice," "virtuoso," "rival," "miser," "philanthropist," "novice," "hermit," and "tyrant." There were at least ten exposures to each word during the week.

On the first day the students associated words and meanings, as in traditional programs. In contrast with the dictionary method, they quickly went on to play a game in which the teacher tried to elicit the words from the children by giving clues. The students had to explain their guesses—for example, to tell why "crook" might be associated with "accomplice." They also learned about the words' connotations. The teacher would say a word, like "tyrant," and the students would respond either "Yeah!" or "Boo!"

On the second day, the students made up sentences using the words and, to develop automaticity, played a game of matching words with meanings that was scored on both accuracy and speed. On the third day, they used their new knowledge to reason with the words. They constructed contexts or situations around the words and thought about questions such as, "Would an accomplice be more likely to squeal to the police in return for not having to go to jail, rob a bank by himself, or enjoy baby-sitting?" More speed and accuracy drills took up the fourth day's session. The students also explored meaning relations among the words to learn that words are not mutually exclusive: "Could an accomplice be a novice? Would a hermit be a likely accomplice?" Throughout the week, the word play was explicit and public, so the entire class could benefit from each child's growing expertise. Justifying their answers also made the children self-aware about using, reasoning, and playing with words. It made the students metacognitively aware of how to use word knowledge.

On the fifth day, the students took a multiple-choice vocabulary test. Those students in the experimental curriculum increased their vocabulary accuracy from around 30 percent to 95 percent correct on weekly vocabulary quizzes. They scored around 80 percent when retested three weeks later. The experimental group also increased their speed in retrieving word meanings from long-term memory. They could associate a word with its semantic category (for example, "hermit" with the category "person") half a second to a full

A black and white photograph of a young girl with dark hair, wearing a light-colored shirt, looking up at a large grid of shapes. The grid is divided into a 5x5 pattern of squares, each containing a different geometric shape or pattern. The shapes include solid black squares, white squares, triangles, circles, and combinations of these. The girl is positioned in the lower right of the frame, looking towards the grid which is held up in the upper left. The background is dark and indistinct.

The study also showed that any differences between phonics and whole-word students were small and temporary, seldom lasting beyond the second grade. As a practical matter, due partly to the research, few classrooms today are purely phonics or purely whole-word. Official curricula may favor one method over the other, but many teachers' classroom methods are hybrid. Across all reading curricula, the contribution of cognitive research has been to underscore the importance of speed and accuracy—automatically—in word recognition. Although not sufficient to ensure fluent reading, automaticity is a necessary early reading skill that precedes, predicts, and contributes to eventual expertise.

In short, maybe the debate was great, but the issue isn't. Many children have learned to read using phonics; many have learned using the whole-word method; most acquire low-level reading skills such as word recognition. Today, the results of the NAEP indicate that most American children achieve the low levels of reading proficiency and master decoding. At age thirteen, nearly 100 percent of American students have rudimentary reading skills and over 95 percent have basic reading skills (Mullis and Jenkins 1990). Thus, further debate about how to teach word recognition doesn't address the most pressing educational problem. The pressing problem is that too few children are acquiring the higher-level comprehension skills. They can decode, but they can't comprehend and use what they decode—they can't construct a gist. We have to address how to teach these high-order reading skills.

Improving Linguistic Knowledge: Rich Vocabulary Instruction

Children arrive at school with sophisticated language-comprehension skills and with a store of grammatical knowledge which they can apply to spoken language. One thing children must do to become fluent readers is build their vocabularies—expand their lexicons. Learning vocabulary is an impressive but unnoticed cognitive achievement. By some estimates, the average first-grader understands 5000 words, the average college student 50,000. Thus, between first grade and college an avid language learner may learn as many as eleven new words per day.

We memorize meanings for some words, but we learn many more by using what we already know while reading to figure out unfamiliar words from context. However, to figure out a word's meaning from context, a reader must already have

73

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

BRUCE GILBERT

second faster than students in a comparison group who received traditional vocabulary instruction. Students who received the new curriculum improved from the 35th to the 44th percentile on the vocabulary subtest of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, and on the reading-comprehension subtest students in the experimental group improved from the 37th to the 45th percentile. Students in the comparison group showed no significant improvement over their pre-instruction performance. Students in the new program also improve on making inferences about the meanings of unfamiliar words in contexts that did not give obvious clues. For example, they became much better at answering questions such as this: "When Father heard that Lisa had ripped up the letter from Steve, Father *commended* her for it. What did Father think of Steve?" This suggests that the new method also improved students' ability to figure out word meanings from context.

Rich instruction, as Beck, McKeown, and their colleagues called their method, was a vocabulary method that improved reading comprehension. It worked in part because it embedded vocabulary instruction in the larger context of language comprehension. How could a teacher use this method in an actual classroom? Classroom time is a limited commodity, and rich instruction takes a lot of it. Beck, a former classroom teacher, has an answer: "Teachers have to be clever about which words they target for rich instruction."

Common words ("dog," "mother," "red," "ball") require no instruction at all. Students can best learn low-frequency, context-specific words ("nebula," "sonata," "estuary," "gene") through subject-matter instruction. But, Beck points out, there is a vast middle class of moderately high-frequency, general-use words—"retort," "ponder," "delve," "dearth"—that should be targets for rich instruction. Beck estimates that there are around 7000 such "middle-class" word families. She also suggests that teachers concentrate on the middle-class words that are crucial for understanding a particular story and whose word families are applicable to other pieces of literature and to situations in daily life (Beck et al. 1987). If children can learn four hundred of these words per year between grades 3 and 9, they will have learned 40 percent of these middle-tier words—a significant expansion in vocabulary knowledge. This is a conservative estimate; if the Matthew Effect operates, then the learning of new words will accelerate as children gradually add more words to their lexicons.

Rich instruction is finding its way into classrooms. In 1983, Beck and McKeown published an article in *The Reading Teacher* describing the method and its rationale. The article invited

teachers to write in for sample vocabulary lessons. The authors received thousands of requests, and are still receiving them. About fifty teachers sent second letters commenting on the method and materials after they had used them. One follow-up letter was from Dot Ashmore, who teaches grades 4 and 5 at the Trinity School in Atlanta. She wrote back saying how the program had rekindled her interest in words. She included some of her own lessons and a letter she had sent to parents explaining this new approach based on ideas from "some researchers." She wrote:

The researchers hypothesize that words truly "belong" to us when we know them in a way that goes beyond simple association between definition and word. With each encounter, the word can take on a new connotation, a new flexibility We hope we are providing the students many chances to encounter words that they might normally let pass over their heads. With some of these words, they will be building new connections between words. With other words, all we can expect is some beginning idea of general meaning As we try to stimulate thinking about different word relationships, we have been getting some unexpected thinking One of the pleasant surprises is that children are excited to run across one of our words.

Beck and her coworkers took delight in how Ms. Ashmore's letter captured the essence of their work. The letter is evidence that they had succeeded in explaining why rich instruction works in a way that touched the classroom.

Background Knowledge in Learning to Read

The "washing clothes" example showed us that readers need background knowledge that is not literally on the printed page. This knowledge, stored as schemas in long-term memory, helps readers make inferences and connections that are implied but not explicitly stated in the text and makes text modeling possible. Background knowledge allows readers to apply common sense about the larger world in constructing a text's meaning.

The Matthew Effect also applies to background knowledge: The more background knowledge a reader has, the easier it is for him or her to get more of it *by reading*. Although schemas can't be directly taught (they have to be constructed by the reader-learner), we can make schema construction easier by ensuring that any relevant background knowledge the reader has is active during reading. We can help young readers with this if our instruction and our reading materials are sensitive to what they may already know.

How sensitive to children's prior knowledge are the reading programs used in schools? The impor-

75

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

tance of background knowledge, once pointed out, seems almost too obvious for reading programs to ignore. Most school reading programs attempt to address the importance of background knowledge in the preparatory discussions and pre-reading activities suggested in the teacher's manual. The materials and techniques are based largely on intuitive, common-sense notions, but they are not always attuned to what most children know or to the central story ideas they are trying to teach.

Beck and her colleagues attacked this problem in the late 1970s. (See Beck et al. 1979.) They analyzed commonly used reading curricula from a cognitive perspective and found three major deficiencies. First, the texts often used ideas unfamiliar to the children. To counter objections that reading texts lacked content, publishers started to include literature in grade-school reading books. This provided an opportunity to expand and elaborate on children's preexisting schemas; however, the literature required specialized background knowledge beyond second- and third-graders' daily experience. Oddly, instead of expanding pre-reading activities to cope with the more difficult content, the reading programs reduced pre-reading activities. Second, in the remaining pre-reading activities, the concepts chosen for discussion—concepts intended to activate relevant background knowledge—were often peripheral to the story's gist. Third, the strategies, exercises, and comprehension questions in the teachers' manuals paid too little attention to central story concepts.

At this point, the researchers wondered what would happen to comprehension if reading lessons contained relevant background knowledge and emphasized central story content. What would happen if reading lessons were revised on the basis of cognitive principles? Beck, Omanson, and McKeown (1982) analyzed teachers' materials in two widely used reading series and then redesigned pre-story preparation, pre-silent-reading preparation, story illustrations, and post-reading questions. Their hypothesis was that focusing on central story content, as derived from expert readers' gists, would improve reading comprehension.

First, they defined central story content systematically by appealing to how expert readers construct and integrate propositions and how they use these propositions in text modeling to develop a gist. The researchers divided every sentence in each story into clauses, each clause standing for a single proposition (proposition construction). Next, they analyzed how these propositions interrelated temporally and causally within the story structure (proposition integration). Once they had the propositional model, they asked expert readers to identify central story units. They defined cen-

tral story units as units depicting basic, unanalyzable events that either introduce a main character or form a sequence of connected events leading from the story's start to its finish. The central story units correspond to the representations expert readers store in long-term memory as the story's gist. Beck calls these central units and the structure linking them a *story map*.

The research team used the story map to rewrite the pre-story preparation in a way that emphasized the central story schema. In the Arachne myth, for example, Arachne agrees that if Athena beats her in a spinning contest, then Arachne will never spin again. The myth's central schema is the notion of a bargain or an agreement. Pre-silent-reading preparation based on the story map would reactivate or prime relevant knowledge the children should already have stored about this central concept. For example, whereas the standard preparation might ask, "What happens to Arachne?" a more focused instruction might be, "On this page you will find out what happens to Arachne because of her bargain with Athena." The investigators also redrew the stories' illustrations to be sure that the pictorial information did not conflict with story events in theme or content. Finally, they prepared comprehension questions on the entire story to help the children develop a more expert story map, or gist. The research team used the central story units as a source for questions. Surprisingly, they had found that only one-third of the post-reading questions in the commercially prepared materials tapped key story events.

They tested the rewritten materials on forty-eight third-graders in two urban schools near Pittsburgh. First, they divided the children into two groups of twenty-four on the basis of reading achievement scores. Within each ability group, twelve children used the revised reading lessons and twelve the standard commercial lessons. They tested the children's reading comprehension by asking them to recall what they had read (i.e., to state the gists of the stories) and by means of multiple-choice tests. The third-graders who used the revised materials outperformed the children who used the standard lessons on recall of the central story content (37 percent vs. 27 percent) and scored 10 percent higher on the comprehension questions. The revised lessons were particularly helpful for less skilled readers (those who had difficulty in getting the gist and in answering comprehension questions on central story ideas).

This was a small-scale study that used only two stories, but it was a first step in showing that comprehension can be improved if the reading materials are sensitive to the importance of background

knowledge. One might argue that the improvement was small; however, in view of the Matthew Effect even a 10 percent improvement in comprehension each year beginning in third grade could have substantial long-term results.

Upon completing the study, in 1982, Beck was quick to point out that larger, long-term studies were needed to identify exactly what caused the improvement. Many researchers and teachers followed this lead. In 1990 Beck said: "I think the role of background knowledge has been disseminated to the practitioner community by much work in the field, of which my own is a part. Teachers are more sensitive to it and basal readers seem to be doing a better job. The idea of the story map seems to have been incorporated into most new reading curricula. At least the boilerplate in various programs purports to develop questions based on the idea. Still, because the idea of background knowledge influencing comprehension seems so obvious, subtle effects of background knowledge can be missed."

Background Knowledge in Reading to Learn

Not only should children learn to read in school; they should also read to learn. Reading, after all, is an enabling skill. How effective are textbooks in helping students learn and understand subject matter? If they are not effective, why not? Beck, McKeown and their associates are currently working on this question.

They have analyzed four commercially available social studies curricula used in elementary schools. Too often, critiques of social studies curricula are superficial and largely ideological. The LRDC group wanted to dig beneath the surface content and see how students' prior knowledge interacts with social studies lessons, independent of ideological slant. They applied methods of cognitive science to get inside the curricula.

Their analyses again revealed three major deficiencies. First, the relation between content and instructional goals was not always clear. Second, there were unrealistic assumptions about the extent of children's background knowledge. Third, there was inadequate explanation of significant events and their interrelations.

Fifth-grade American history is usually students' first exposure to history as a school subject. Beck and her colleagues decided to look in detail at how the various curricula taught the American Revolution. First, they developed a story map for this historical period. Unlike a map for the Arachne myth, a map for a history lesson is built around a history schema. Myths and history

lessons are different kinds of texts. History can have a story structure, but chains of historical causation link events in the structure. Events occur and have consequences. People react, and their reactions have further historical consequences. Facts are important in history, but their causal-historical interconnection is essential. That is what makes a history book different from a novel.

The story map for the Revolution contained two central ideas: the role of Britain in the American colonies and the significance of the revolutionary motto, "No taxation without representation."

How did the texts treat these central ideas? Only one of the four texts studied had any extended discussion of how a distinct American identity emerged in the colonies. The texts gave static descriptions of colonial life in New England, the Central Atlantic colonies, and the South, but gave no coherent description of how a variety of European settlements in the New World came under British dominance to form the thirteen original colonies. Surprisingly, the texts did not always state clearly that the thirteen colonies were British possessions and that Britain was the ruling power.

On the issue of representative government, the texts mentioned the taxation motto, that Britain levied taxes, and that colonists lacked representation in Parliament. But these facts were not historically integrated to explain what representative government is and why people can value it so highly. Apparently, the texts assumed that fifth-graders have robust background knowledge about both the role of Britain in colonial life and the concept of representative government.

The problem, as Beck and McKeown found out, is that fifth-graders don't have this knowledge. She and her colleagues studied a class of fifth-graders before they took American history. They said to each student, "Tell me anything you know about the American Revolution." This statement was a general, direct probe of students' knowledge—an invitation for students to unload topic knowledge from long-term memory. It was the students' chance to reveal everything they knew about the period, including the role of Britain in the colonies and the importance of representative government. In response, 60 percent of the students gave *no* information about why the Revolution occurred, 74 percent didn't mention that the war was between Britain and its colonies, and 57 percent offered no information about which side won. When directly asked what "No taxation without representation" meant, only one fifth-grader out of thirty five had any idea about the concept of representative government.

77

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

When Beck and McKeown asked the same question of thirty-seven sixth-graders who had studied American history, 60 percent gave no information about the cause of the Revolution, 57 percent didn't mention Britain as the opponent, and 40 percent gave no information on the war's outcome. Only two sixth-graders showed an understanding of representative government. The sixth-graders' performance suggested that their fifth-grade history instruction had been highly ineffective. The texts' treatment of central ideas was not sensitive to the concepts' complexities or to the children's meager pre-instruction knowledge.

Children also lack an understanding of history's causal structure, which one must have to understand a historical period and to remember and use historical information. Beck and McKeown found this deficiency when they asked students six other questions that attempted to tap their knowledge of the Revolution from different perspectives. The questions gave students different initial cues with which to begin searching their American Revolution knowledge structures: Why do Americans celebrate the Fourth of July? What is the Declaration of Independence? What were the thirteen original colonies? How did the United States become a country?

If a student understood the historical relationship among the events of the Revolutionary period, one would expect considerable overlap in the answers he or she gave to the six questions, because all the events mentioned in the questions should be connected in a causal network—an American Revolution schema. A student with an adequate understanding of the period should have a memory structure and should use that network to give extended, elaborated answers to the questions. A student with an adequate understanding should be able to use this information as cues to enter the structure, and should be able to follow the associative links to find additional information with which to elaborate an answer.

After their American history course, the sixth-graders in this study didn't give extended, overlapping, elaborated answers. They responded with simple, literal answers to the specific questions. They didn't have rich, connected conceptual structures for the historical period. On the basis of his fifth-grade studies, Tony's knowledge of the period was fragmented into four "islands." For example, he made no connection among the thirteen colonies, the Revolutionary War, and the "no taxation" motto. Thus, for Tony, the question on the thirteen colonies prompted comments on the first colonies and the president, but no comments on representative government, Britain, or the emer-

gence of the United States as a new country.

Tony, and most of the other students, could recall relevant knowledge when questions were asked in one way, but not when they were asked in a different way. For example, 50 percent of the sixth-graders mentioned Britain when asked about how the United States became a country, but only 25 percent did so when asked about the Declaration of Independence, and only 11 percent when asked about the original thirteen colonies. Such fractured knowledge structures, typical of novices, result in inert historical knowledge. Students might have the knowledge, but they lack the associative links they need to access the knowledge in all situations where it is relevant.

Beck and McKeown concluded that elementary school instruction isn't sufficiently explicit about history's causal structure: "As instruction is now presented in current elementary social studies textbooks, students seem to acquire bits and pieces of information. Without a focus to what is learned, these bits and pieces compete for attention, and students have no way to judge their value, role, or appropriateness for the overall topic" (McKeown and Beck 1990, p. 723).

Next, the researchers prepared revised history texts that were sensitive to background knowledge and were explicit about the causal structure of the historical period (Beck et al. 1991). They identified places in history texts where students' comprehension might fail because of lack of background knowledge, difficulty in keeping track of what terms mean, and gaps in the presentation of causal and temporal relations. They then hypothesized how expert readers might deal with these problems and revised the texts in accord with the experts' probable solutions. The result is a text that clarifies, elaborates, explains, and motivates important information. The text makes explicit how events are related historically.

For example, the first sentence in an original text read:

In 1763 Britain and the colonies ended a 7-year war with the French and Indians.

This sentence is difficult, even for an expert. It begins the lesson on the French and Indian War, a war not previously mentioned, with a statement about how it ended. The sentence is also informationally dense, mentioning Britain, colonies, French, Indians, and war. Applying the expert's gist, Beck and her colleagues turned this one sentence into seven in the revised text:

About 250 years ago, Britain and France both claimed to own some of the same land, here, in North America. The land was just west of where the 13 colonies were. In 1756, Britain and France went to war

to see who would get control of this land. Because the 13 American colonies belonged to Britain, the colonies fought on the same side as Britain. Many Indians fought on the same side as France. Because we were fighting against the French and Indians, the war has come to be known as the French and Indian War. The war ended in 1763.

The revised text states explicitly some of the missing background knowledge (such as that the thirteen colonies belonged to Britain) not found in the standard text, and provides more information to link ideas in the text. It gives students more information to use in their proposition construction, their proposition integration, and their text modeling.

The research team applied this method to prepare four revised lessons: "the French and Indian War," "No taxation without representation," "the Boston Tea Party," and "the Intolerable Acts." They used the original texts with fifth-graders in November as part of the regular American history class. They used the revised lessons with fourth-graders in the same school the following May.

The revised texts helped students construct richer knowledge structures for the historical period. The four revised lessons contained 124 idea units based on the expert's gist. Students using the revised material recalled 18 percent of these units, whereas students using the original texts recalled only 13.6 percent. On comprehension questions, the group using the revised lessons scored 49.1 percent; the group using the standard text scored only 29.9 percent. As with the reading lessons, the revised history materials were particularly helpful for students of lower ability. With the standard text, students in the top quartile for reading scores far outperformed students in the bottom quartile on both recalling central ideas and in answering comprehension questions. With the revised texts, the high-ability students still did better; however, the difference in performance between high- and low-ability students was smaller and was not statistically significant.

The differences in comprehension performance were not just a matter of remembering more of the text. Analysis of the students' oral answers to the six test questions allowed the researchers to assess the representations students had constructed for the various topics (Beck et al. 1991). On the "No taxation without representation" lesson, students using the revised materials were more likely to understand that the colonists' distress over taxes arose from their desire for representative government rather than from unwillingness to part with money. When quizzed with the test questions, the students showed that they had constructed more highly connected and well-integrated knowledge

structures. The students gave elaborated answers, and the information in the answers overlapped. Their historical knowledge was less inert, because they had moved toward constructing a causal-explanatory structure of the period's history.

National assessments have documented students' deficiencies in social science and literature knowledge. Diane Ravitch and Chester Finn (1987) discuss one such assessment in their book *What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know?* In 1990, Richard W. Riley, a former governor of South Carolina and an NAEP board member, commenting on an assessment of civics and history knowledge, observed that most students have no more than a "Trivial Pursuit kind of familiarity" with the subject matter. Students could identify names, dates, and terms, but few knew the significance of the people or events in American history or government. Ninety-nine percent of twelfth-graders knew basic historical facts, but only 5 percent could interpret historical information (Hammack 1990). School curricula are not imparting high-order social studies skills.

The fractured pattern of information recall and the inability to grasp the significance of historical information reported in the national assessments are consistent with what Beck and her colleagues found in their small-scale studies. Their work, however, goes beyond describing *what* students don't know. Applying cognitive methods to the teaching and learning of social studies tells us *why* most students acquire only "Trivial Pursuit knowledge": Students aren't acquiring rich, complex knowledge structures, and the texts are partly at fault. The texts make unrealistic assumptions about children's background knowledge and aren't sufficiently explicit about the historical links among events, dates, and persons. Beck's work also suggests what must be done: We must revise materials and methods so that they exploit what we know about reading to learn. We have to be as concerned with *how* content is taught as we have been with *what* content is taught.

The Big Picture: Reciprocal Teaching, Metacognition, and Reading

Reciprocal teaching, the method mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, improved Charles's classroom reading comprehension by four grade levels in twenty days. This method illustrates how instruction designed on cognitive principles can help children to apply language-comprehension skills in their reading and to acquire the metacognitive strategies essential to

79

American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader

skilled reading.

Reciprocal teaching also shows how researchers, administrators, and teachers can collaborate to apply the results of research in the classroom. Annemarie Palincsar, Ann Brown, and Kathryn Ransom—a graduate student, a professor, and a school administrator—shared the belief that cognitive research could improve classroom practice and that classroom practice can improve research.

After five years working as a special education teacher and administrator, Palincsar returned to the University of Illinois as a doctoral student. She felt her previous training in psychodiagnostics—training based on a medical model of learning disabilities—was not meeting the needs of her students. She decided to broaden her academic background and to study how sociocultural factors might influence students' experience in school.

The cognitive revolution was spreading through academic circles, but had not yet reached teacher-practitioners. Palincsar's classroom experience influenced her choice of a thesis project. In her words: "As a teacher, one of the situations I found most baffling was having children who were fairly strong decoders but had little comprehension or recall of what they had read." She was baffled by students like Charles.

At first, Palincsar was interested in how self-verbalization might be used to help children regulate their cognitive processing. Donald Meichenbaum (1985) had developed techniques based on self-verbalization to help impulsive children—children who mentally fail to stop, look, and listen—pace their actions and develop self-control. At the time, most of the work on self-verbalization had explored how it could be used to regulate social behavior. Palincsar wondered how it might be used to regulate *cognitive* behavior—specifically, how it might be used to improve reading comprehension. She wrote to Meichenbaum, who suggested that the application of his ideas to academic subjects might be strengthened by incorporating ideas from research on metacognition. He told Palincsar to discuss her idea with Ann Brown, an authority on metacognition who at that time was also at Illinois.

At their initial meeting, Palincsar showed Brown a design for the pilot study that was to evolve into reciprocal teaching. Brown offered her a quarter-time research appointment to do the study. When it proved successful (Brown and Palincsar 1982), Brown gave Palincsar a full-time research assistantship and supervised her thesis research.

Palincsar and Brown developed reciprocal teaching from the pilot study on a sound theoretical basis. (See Brown and Palincsar 1987.) They

analyzed the task's demands, developed a theory of task performance based on expert-novice studies, and formulated a theory of instruction that might improve task performance. This is the same sequence Bob Siegler followed with the balance-scale task. A major difference, of course, is that reading comprehension presents a more complex problem than the balance scale.

FROM THEIR ANALYSIS AND A REVIEW OF previous research, Palincsar and Brown (1984) identified six functions that most researchers agreed were essential to expert reading comprehension: The competent reader *understands* that the goal in reading is to construct meaning, *activates* relevant background knowledge, *allocates* attention or cognitive resources to concentrate on major content ideas, *evaluates* the constructed meaning (the gist) for internal consistency and compatibility with prior knowledge and common sense, *draws* and *tests* inferences (including interpretations, predictions, and conclusions), and *monitors* all the above to see if comprehension is occurring.

Palincsar and Brown then identified four simple strategies that would together tap all six functions needed for comprehension: *summarizing*, *questioning*, *clarifying*, and *predicting*. They explained the relation between the four strategies and the six functions as follows (Palincsar and Brown 1986): Summarizing a passage requires that the reader recall and state the gist he or she has constructed. Thus, a reader who can summarize has activated background knowledge to integrate information appearing in the text, allocated attention to the main points, and evaluated the gist for consistency. Formulating a question about a text likewise depends on the gist and the functions needed for summarizing, but with the additional demand that the reader monitor the gist to pick out important points. When clarifying, a reader must allocate attention to difficult points and engage in critical evaluation of the gist. Making predictions involves drawing and testing inferences on the basis of what is in the text together with activated background knowledge. A reader who self-consciously uses all four strategies would certainly appreciate that the goal of reading is to construct meaning.

Expert-novice studies supported the hypothesized connection between comprehension functions and strategies. After completing a comprehension task, expert readers reported that they spent a lot of time summarizing, questioning, clarifying, and predicting. Experts' "comprehend aloud" protocols substantiated these self-reports. Poor readers did not report using the strategies and showed no evidence of using them in their

80

The Task
Before Us:
A QuEST
Reader

comprehension protocols. As Palincsar and Brown characterize it, novices executed a "once-over, desperate, nonfocused read."

But can you teach the strategies to novices? And if you can, will it improve their comprehension? To answer this question, Palincsar and Brown designed a prototype instructional intervention to teach non-experts how to use the strategies. As with all instruction, the primary problem is transfer. How should one teach the strategies to get novices to use them spontaneously? Successful strategy instruction must include practice on specific task-appropriate skills (the cognitive aspect), explicit instruction on how to supervise and monitor these skills (the metacognitive aspect), and explanations of why the skills work (the informed instruction aspect).

The new synthesis suggests what teachers should do to help students master strategies. First, teachers have to make the strategies overt, explicit and concrete. Teachers can best do this by modeling the strategies for the students.

Second, to avoid inert strategies, teachers should link the strategies to the contexts in which they are to be used and teach the strategies as a functioning group, not in isolation. This suggests that reading-strategy instruction should take place during reading-comprehension tasks, where the explicit goal is to construct meaning from written symbols. Teachers should teach with the big picture in mind.

Third, instruction must be informed. The students should be fully aware of why the strategies work and where they should use particular strategies. Thus, instruction should involve discussion of a text's content and students' understanding of why the strategies are useful in that situation.

Fourth, students have to realize the strategies work no matter what their current level of performance. Thus, instruction should include feedback from the teacher about the students' success relative to their individual abilities and encouragement to persist even if a student is not yet fully competent.

Finally, if students are to become spontaneous strategy users, responsibility for comprehension must be transferred from the teacher to the students gradually, but as soon as possible. This suggests that the teacher should slowly raise the demands made on the students and then fade into the background, becoming less an active modeler and more a sympathetic coach. Students should gradually take charge of their learning.

Palincsar designed reciprocal teaching to satisfy all five of these requirements. Reciprocal teaching takes the form of a dialogue. Dialogue is a language game children understand, and it is a game

that allows control of a learning session to alternate between teacher and student. Most important, when engaged in dialogue students are *using* their language-comprehension skills. In reciprocal teaching, dialogue directs these skills toward reading.

The dialogue becomes a form of cooperative learning, in which teachers model the strategies for the students and then give students guided practice in applying them to a group task of constructing a text's meaning. Teacher and students take turns leading a dialogue about the portion of text they are jointly trying to understand. The dialogue includes spontaneous discussion and argument emphasizing the four strategies.

IN RECIPROCAL TEACHING, THE TEACHER assigns the reading group a portion of a text and designates one student to be the leader for that segment. Initially, the teacher might be the leader. The group reads the passage silently. Then the assigned leader summarizes the passage, formulates a question that might be asked on a test, discusses and clarifies difficult points, and finally makes a prediction about what might happen next in the story. The teacher provides help and feedback tailored to the needs and abilities of the current leader. The student-listeners act as supportive critics who encourage the leader to explain and clarify the text. Each student takes a turn as leader. The group's public goal is collaborative construction of the text's meaning. The teacher provides a model of expert performance. As the students improve, the teacher fades into the background.

In the first test of reciprocal teaching, Palincsar served as the teacher and worked with one student at a time. The students were seventh-graders in a remedial reading program who had adequate decoding skills but who were at least three grades behind in reading comprehension. At first, students found it difficult to be the leader, and Palincsar had to do a lot of modeling and prompting, but gradually the students' performance improved. In the initial sessions, over half the questions students formulated were inadequate. Only 11 percent of the questions addressed main ideas, and only 11 percent of the summaries captured the gist of the passage. After ten tutoring sessions, however, students could generate reasonably sophisticated questions and summaries. By the end of training, 96 percent of the students' questions were appropriate, 64 percent of the questions addressed main ideas, and 60 percent of their summaries captured the gists of the passages.

Students' reading comprehension improved along with their performance in reciprocal teach-

81

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

ing. On daily comprehension tests, scores improved from 10 percent to 85 percent correct and stayed at this level for at least six months after reciprocal teaching ended. Back in the classroom, reciprocal-teaching students improved their performance on other reading tasks from the 7th percentile before reciprocal teaching to the 50th percentile after. Palincsar repeated the study working with two children simultaneously and obtained the same results. (Charles, mentioned above, was one of the students in this second study.)

Palincsar and Brown wanted to know if reciprocal teaching was the most efficient way to achieve these gains before they asked teachers to try it in classrooms. Reciprocal teaching demands a great deal of the teacher's time and requires intensive interaction with small groups of students. Both are valuable classroom commodities. Could the same results be achieved more efficiently by a different method? Reciprocal teaching turned out to be superior to all the alternatives tested (Brown and Palincsar 1987, 1989). In all the comparison studies, reciprocal teaching improved remedial seventh-graders' performance on comprehension tests from less than 40 percent before instruction to between 70 and 80 percent after instruction, a level typically achieved by average seventh-graders. The best of the alternative methods—explicit strategy instruction, where the teacher demonstrated and discussed each strategy and the students then completed worksheets on the strategies—raised scores from around 40 percent to between 55 and 60 percent (Brown and Palincsar 1987). These studies showed that the intense and prolonged student-teacher interaction characteristic of reciprocal teaching is crucial to its success (Palincsar et al. 1988). This is the investment teachers have to make to cash in on reciprocal teaching's dividends.

Into the Classroom

Can reciprocal teaching work in a real classroom? Here Kathryn Ransom, Coordinator for Reading and Secondary Education in District 186, Springfield, Illinois, enters the story. Ransom—a former teacher—is a veteran, professional educator. She makes it clear she has seen many trends come and go, and realizes that neither she nor the schools will please all the people all the time. Nonetheless, Ransom devotes time and effort to get new things happening in the Springfield schools. She has become adept at, as she puts it, “making deals” with research groups. “We can bring in people who have exciting ideas that need to become practical, and as the researchers work with Springfield teachers they

can provide staff development experiences I never could.”

Springfield's District 186 serves a population of 15,000 students, from kindergarten through high school. The system is 25 to 28 percent minority. On standardized tests, classes at all grade levels score at or above grade level in all subjects. This is a solid achievement, Ransom points out, because the majority of special education children in the district receive instruction in regular classrooms. When it was time for the classroom testing of reciprocal teaching, Palincsar approached Ransom. Ransom saw the potential of reciprocal teaching and recognized in Palincsar a researcher who could make cognitive science meaningful to administrators and teachers. The researcher and the administrator struck a deal advantageous to both.

Together, they decided to approach Springfield's middle school remedial reading teachers. These teachers worked daily with children who had adequate decoding skills but no functional comprehension skills. Ransom and Palincsar collaborated to design a staff development program that would encourage the teachers to think about instructional goals and methods and that would allow the researchers to introduce reciprocal teaching and the theory behind it. The teachers first watched videos of Palincsar conducting reciprocal teaching sessions. Later the teachers took part in reciprocal teaching sessions, playing the roles of teacher and student. Next a teacher and a researcher jointly conducted a reciprocal teaching lesson. The final training consisted of three formal sessions on the method over a three-day period.

In the first classroom study of reciprocal teaching, four volunteer remedial reading teachers used the method with their classes (Palincsar et al. 1988). Class size varied from four to seven students. Before reciprocal teaching, the baseline on daily reading-assessment tests for the students was 40 percent. After twenty days of reciprocal teaching their performance rose to between 70 and 80 percent, just as in Palincsar's initial laboratory studies. Students maintained this level of performance after reciprocal teaching and also improved their performance on other classroom comprehension tasks, including science and social studies reading. Reciprocal teaching worked in the classroom! Experienced volunteer teachers, after limited training, could replicate the laboratory results in classroom settings.

Palincsar and Ransom obtained similar results in a study that used conscripted teachers, who varied greatly in experience and expertise. The students also were more diverse in their reading deficiencies than the students in the first study. Class size varied from seven to fifteen, with an average

size of twelve. Each teacher taught one reciprocal teaching group and one control group; the latter received standard reading-skills instruction. Again, after twenty days of reciprocal instruction, scores on daily comprehension tests improved to 72 percent for the reciprocal teaching group, versus 58 percent for the control group. Thus, average classroom teachers, working in less-than-ideal circumstances and teaching groups of seven or more students, replicated the original laboratory results. As the ultimate test, the Springfield team ran an experiment in which the strongest student in a remedial group served as the teacher. In this study, the student-teachers improved their scores on comprehension tests from 72 percent to 85 percent correct. The other students in the group improved their scores from 50 percent to 70 percent correct.

Since the study ended, in 1989, reciprocal teaching has become a mainstay in the Springfield schools. It is now used in all remedial reading classes, and its methods have been incorporated in some form into all regular classroom reading programs. Even more encouraging, Springfield teachers exposed to reciprocal teaching and to the importance of strategic thinking attempt to integrate these elements into their teaching of other subjects.

One benefit of reciprocal teaching, and of similar projects in the Springfield system, has been the teachers' participation in extended applied research. This was part of Ransom's original agenda. A project running over five years, as reciprocal teaching did, provides a powerful way to change teachers' behavior. Most in-service training for teachers lasts only a day or two and at best can have only a minor impact on their thinking and their performance. Ransom sees collaboration in classroom research as a way for teachers and researchers to interact in a dignified, mutually beneficial way. The teachers gain meaningful in-service experience that is intellectually satisfying. Working closely with fellow teachers and other education professionals helps them overcome the isolation of seven-hour days as the only adult in the classroom. The research team also gains, as the reciprocal teaching researchers will attest. The teachers initially helped refine reciprocal teaching for classroom use, providing important insights

into how to make an instructional prototype work in a school. Later, they helped identify new research questions and helped the researchers design ways to test the method's classroom effectiveness. Because of her Springfield experience, Palincsar decided that all her subsequent educational research would be done in close collaboration with classroom professionals.

Interest in reciprocal teaching continues within District 186 through instructional chaining. A network has developed in which teachers who have used reciprocal teaching conduct in-service sessions for other teachers. By the 1987-88 school year, 150 teachers in twenty-three buildings had taken part in these sessions. Teachers formed peer support groups so they could discuss progress and problems associated with daily use of reciprocal teaching and other strategy instruction. The remedial teachers also helped the district design new reading tests to assess students' use of comprehension strategies. The Springfield experience contributed to ongoing efforts at the state level to revamp reading instruction and to develop reading tests that can measure the skills that methods such as reciprocal teaching try to impart. Veterans of the Springfield experiment now work in other schools and with national educational organizations to improve reading instruction.

In the Springfield schools and in others that have used reciprocal teaching, teachers have a better understanding of what reading is about. As Palincsar and Brown (1986, p. 770) observe, "There was a time not long ago when successful reading was thought to be execution of a series of component subskills." To teach reading one taught the subskills, from word recognition through finding the main idea, often in isolation and in a fixed sequence. Charles and the approximately 60 percent of American 17-year-olds who fail to reach the NAEP's fourth reading proficiency level—who fail to become adept readers (Mullis and Jenkins 1990)—show the inadequacy of this approach. Reciprocal teaching works. The strategies it teaches enable students to apply their language-comprehension skills to reading so that they can read for meaning. Reading is more than decoding and more than the mastery of a series of small, isolated subskills.

83

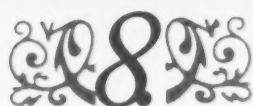
*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*



EDWARD HOPPER THE ART AND THE ARTIST

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART SEPTEMBER 20, 1980 - JANUARY 18, 1981





Higher-Order Thinking Skills for Disadvantaged Students

Conventional wisdom holds that low achieving children should proceed at a slower pace in material that is broken down into discrete steps, an approach that is based in reductionist learning theory, prominent several decades ago. When this "slow it down" approach is applied to whole classrooms of low achieving children, there is little possibility that the educational status of any of these learners will improve . . . In other words, we do not have to look beyond the school for the reasons why low achieving children do not read and write well. The way instruction is organized in schools and the kinds of tasks and texts given to the children limit their access to knowledge and ensure their continued low achievement.

—ANNE MCGILL-FRANZEN
AND RICHARD ALLINGTON, 1991

THE INCLUSION OF HIGHER-ORDER thinking skills, or advanced skills, in the 1988 Hawkins-Stafford Amendments to the Chapter 1 law represented a departure from the basic skills orientation of the Chapter 1 program. Today, innovative programs focusing on higher expectations and more challenging instruction are making their way into Chapter 1 classrooms.

This selection is excerpted from the National Assessment of Chapter 1: The Interim Report released in June 1992 by the U. S. Department of Education.

This section briefly outlines conventional instructional practices for serving disadvantaged students and describes the uses and impact of alternative paradigms and strategies for offering higher-order thinking skills.

■ As noted in the Study of Alternatives to Conventional Wisdom, most remedial and compensatory education programs were designed to provide low-achieving students with additional practice for mastery of basic content knowledge. The curricula taught were grounded in the belief that children learn discrete skills in a hierarchical manner. Indeed, classroom studies have documented that children considered at risk for academic failure receive less instruction in complex skills than their more advantaged counterparts.

■ Recent studies indicate that students who are exposed to academically challenging forms of instruction in math, reading, and writing are likely to perform better at the end of the school year than students whose instruction concentrates on basic skills.

■ Efforts to integrate more advanced skills into the instruction of disadvantaged students take place both within instructional programs and throughout schools and districts.

■ According to district Chapter 1 coordinators, Chapter 1 instruction accounts for only twenty-

85

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

four to thirty minutes a day, five days a week. Because Chapter 1 represents only a small portion of a student's day, both Chapter 1 and regular teachers need to learn the most effective methods to instruct at-risk students and to promote higher-order thinking skills.

Conventional Practice

Until recently, most remedial and compensatory education programs were designed to provide low-achieving students with additional practice for mastery of basic content knowledge. Chapter 1 curricula were grounded in the belief that children learn discrete skills in a hierarchical manner—in much the same way as a child constructs a pyramid with blocks. First, the basics, such as phonetic decoding and arithmetic operations, must be taught. Once this foundation is laid, higher-order skills such as reasoning and comprehension can be taught (Knapp et al. 1990; Knapp and Turnbull 1990).

Compensatory education programs have adopted this hierarchical model and focused on basic skills. Indeed, classroom studies (as reported in the 1987 National Assessment of Chapter 1) have documented that children considered at risk of academic failure receive less instruction in complex skills than do their more advantaged counterparts. Thus, while their peers are exposed to teaching for meaning and deeper understanding, compensatory

Most educationally disadvantaged students appear to fall further and further behind other students as they progress through school.

education students are often drilled on discrete skills such as phonics, vocabulary, and word decoding. Each of these skills is taught in a fragmented, isolated fashion, and often what is taught in the Chapter 1 session is not coordinated with what is taught in the regular program.

Current research indicates that these traditional instructional strategies have limited effectiveness with disadvantaged children because such approaches tend to (1) underestimate what disadvantaged students are capable of doing; (2) postpone more challenging and interesting work for too long or, in some cases, forever; (3) provide no context for learning or for using the skills that are taught; and (4) reinforce academic failure over the long term (Knapp et al. 1990).

When intelligently applied, traditional compensatory curricula tend to improve student performance on standardized tests, especially tests that emphasize basic skills, but no comparable gains have been found on measures of more advanced skills (Knapp and Shields 1990). In fact, most educationally disadvantaged students appear to fall further and further behind other students as they progress through school. In the higher grades, where greater emphasis is placed on advanced skills of comprehension, problem solving, and reasoning, the gap between educationally disadvantaged students and their more advantaged peers widens (Mullis 1991). Critics of

86

*The Task
Before Us:
A QuEST
Reader*

Exhibit 1

Emerging Standards of "Good Practice"

These alternatives to conventional practice are consistent with views of curriculum and instruction that have gained currency among experts in mathematics, reading, and writing. Emerging standards for these fields have the following emphases:

■ **Mathematics.** More work on understanding and applications, with broader coverage of mathematics topics, less work on computation, and less redundancy across grades.

■ **Reading.** More reading for meaning from the earliest grades (and correspondingly less attention to discrete skills taught out of context); exposure to a wide variety of texts, including material related to students' backgrounds and experiences.

■ **Writing.** More meaningful written communication and less attention to mastery of writing "mechanics" in isolation; introduction to various genres and the processes of writing from the earliest years in school.

Source: Knapp and Turnbull 1990, p. ii.

this kind of instruction argue that, in effect, it places "an unintended ceiling on the learning of disadvantaged students" (Knapp and Shields 1990).

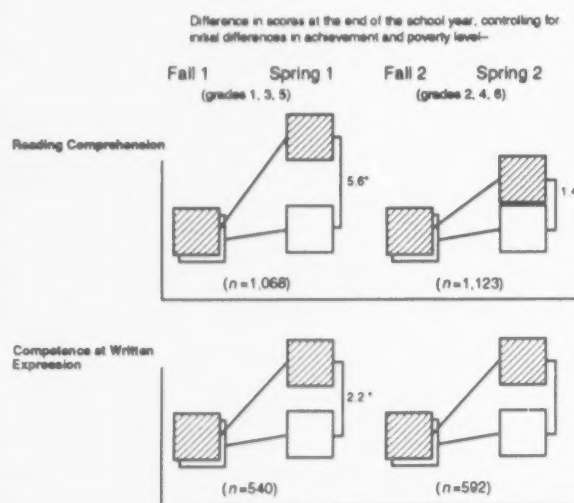
Alternative Paradigms

In the past few years, the conventional wisdom about the most effective ways of educating disadvantaged students has been challenged by researchers who have drawn on new evidence about the way all children learn. Instead of viewing disadvantaged students as being deficient in cognitive, experiential, and linguistic skills, researchers have recently concluded that these students need extra teaching for meaning in order to build on the knowledge, skills, and abilities that each child brings to the classroom (Knapp and Shields 1990). Theorists and researchers now believe that curriculum and instruction for disadvantaged students should emphasize developmental learning over remediation because complex thinking processes are involved in even elementary mental activities.

The development of advanced skills has long been recognized as an appropriate instructional goal for gifted and talented youngsters, for educationally advantaged children, and for older students. By reorganizing the learning of advanced skills as a component of effective instruction for disadvantaged students, the 1987 National Assessment of Chapter 1 acknowledged the benefits of this learning for Chapter 1 participants (Birman et al. 1987). "Disadvantaged students are not qualitatively different from other students and thus do not need qualitatively different educational programs, but . . . these students are likely to need educational programs designed to compensate for the gaps and limitations in their cognitive environments outside of school" (Brophy 1990). Higher-order thinking must be learned at all lev-

Exhibit 2

Effects of Alternative Instructional Practices on Mastery of Advanced Skills in Language Arts Across the School Year



* Statistically significant at $p < .05$

Student exposed to:

☐ Conventional practice in reading and writing

☒ Alternative practice in reading and writing

Exhibit reads: By comparison with their counterparts who received only traditional instruction, students extensively exposed to comprehension-oriented instruction performed 5.6 NCEs higher at the end of the school year (year 1), once initial differences in poverty level and achievement are taken into account.

Source: Academic Challenge for the Children of Poverty, SRI International, 1992

els—not only by the more advanced students. Research is providing us with empirical evidence that teaching for meaning is effective for children at risk of academic failure.

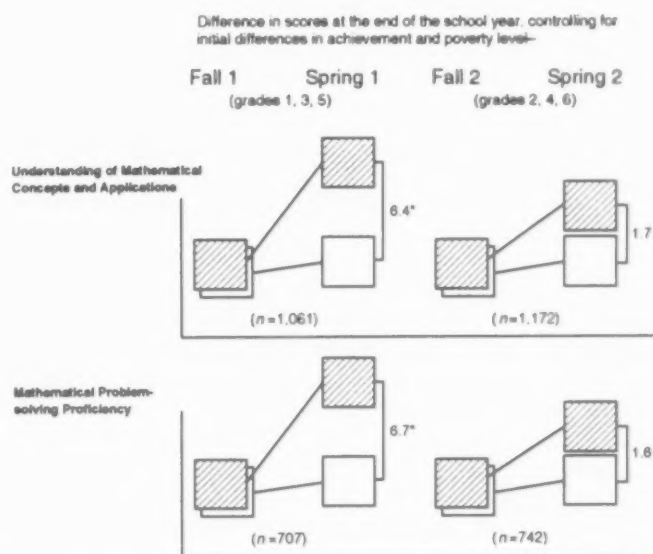
Cognitive science research in mathematics and reading underscores the importance of an emphasis on meaning and understanding beginning in the early elementary grades. Research has shown that educationally disadvantaged students can acquire "advanced" comprehension skills before they can decode the printed word well; similarly, they can solve a variety of mathematics problems, using modeling and counting, before they have perfected the "basic" computational skills that are traditionally regarded as prerequisites. And first-graders can perform sophisticated composition tasks before they have acquired the mechanics of



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Exhibit 3

Effects of Alternative Instructional Practices on Mastery of Advanced Skills in Mathematics Across the School Year



* Statistically significant at $p < .05$

Student exposed to:
☐ Conventional practice in mathematics
☒ Alternative practice in mathematics

Exhibit reads: By comparison with their counterparts exposed to arithmetic skills only, students in classrooms exposed to multiple mathematical topics with attention to conceptual understanding perform 6.4 NCEs higher at the end of the school year (year 1), once initial differences in poverty level and achievement are taken into account.

Source: Academic Challenge for the Children of Poverty, SRI International, 1992

instruction in math, reading, and writing are likely to perform better at the end of the school year than students whose instruction emphasizes basic skills. Exhibit 2 compares the NCE (Normal Curve Equivalent) gains at the end of two years for students who were provided comprehension-oriented instruction and their counterparts who received only traditional instruction. Exhibit 3 compares the NCE gains of students who were exposed only to computational skills and students who were exposed to multiple mathematical topics with attention to conceptual understanding. While these exhibits do not explain differences between NCE gains in the different subjects or between the two years of the study or the fall-fall and spring-spring testing periods, they demonstrate that in virtually all these evaluations, the students whose classrooms focused on more advanced skills displayed higher NCE gains than the students whose classes focused on more traditional instruction. Furthermore, the study indicates that students who initially perform least well (in the bottom third)

writing (see Exhibit 1).

Teaching higher-order skills does not mean neglecting to teach those skills generally regarded as basic. Both can be accomplished by using "a complex, meaningful task as the context for instruction on both advanced and basic skills. Instead of constant drill on basic addition and subtraction facts, these skills are practiced in the context of trying to solve real problems" (Means and Knapp 1991). Indeed, recent evidence indicates that instructional practices focusing on advanced skills promote mastery of both basic and advanced skills for children considered at risk of academic failure (Knapp et al. 1992a,b).

Academic Challenge for the Children of Poverty (Knapp et al. 1992a,b) indicates that students who are exposed to academically challenging forms of

benefit at least as much as other students from alternative forms of instruction that emphasize understanding and problem solving (Knapp et al. 1992a,b).

Examples of Alternative Programs

Experts in various academic subjects have investigated ways to integrate the teaching of lower-level and advanced skills in instruction for disadvantaged students, drawing on strengths that these children bring to school.

Other promising innovations for disadvantaged students are more wide ranging, requiring changes throughout the school and district. They respond to a prevailing sense among policymakers, educa-

89

American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QUEST
Reader

tors, and the public that most reforms based on incremental changes or new instructional technologies have failed and that more comprehensive reforms are needed. For example, a number of schoolwide management initiatives seek to improve achievement for disadvantaged students by focusing on higher expectations and more challenging instruction for all students. The driving spirit behind schoolwide management and reform efforts such as the Accelerated Schools Project, Paideia schools, and the Coalition of Essential Schools is the conviction that fundamental problems in the system cannot be solved through mere tinkering with the existing structure of the school. Beyond this consensus, each approach has its own emphasis and direction. While these programs focus broadly on at-risk students, they are highly relevant to Chapter 1 programs. It should also be noted that these promising approaches are relatively new and thus cannot yet show concrete results in many schools.

90

*The Task
Before Us:
A QuEST
Reader*

Issues to Consider When Integrating More Advanced Skills into Chapter 1

Curriculum

The most prevalent mathematics and reading curricula support the conventional wisdom discussed earlier. The mathematics textbooks and basal readers most commonly used in schools that serve the children of poverty tend to present discrete skills in a sequential manner.

The children of poverty are especially prone to experience the adverse effects of the skills-based curriculum. Typically, they have fewer out-of-school opportunities than their more advantaged counterparts to integrate the learning of discrete skills into true proficiency. Given the frequent disparities between school and their home lives, disadvantaged students often see less purpose for or meaning in skills-based learning tasks than do more-advantaged students; consequently, they need help to find meaning in what they do in school (Knapp and Shields 1990).

There is a need for curricula that include more advanced skills throughout (including the earlier

The reforms that ask the most of students also ask the most of teachers.

stages), allow students to apply skills in context, and emphasize meaning and understanding (Knapp and Turnbull 1990).

Implementation of Staff Retraining

Although innovative models for promoting advanced skills exist, their success depends upon the people implementing them. The reforms described here are comprehensive and far reaching. They do not come in packages, and they cannot be replicated from one site to another. A broad rethinking of curriculum and instruction, with a view toward higher expectations for all students—including those at risk for school failure—requires leadership, collaboration, and ongoing staff retraining. The reforms that ask the most of students also ask the most of teachers.

In order to make these changes, teachers can no longer be thought of as managers of new instructional technologies; they must become expert problem solvers themselves.

Recent experience from the implementation of California's Mathematics Curriculum Framework demonstrates that large-scale curricular reform is not a simple task. The framework was designed to promote students' understanding of mathematical concepts through the use of manipulative materials and problem solving, rather than merely promoting the capacity to remember algorithms and produce correct answers. Preliminary studies of teachers' experience with the framework suggest that some teachers made major changes in their instructional practice while others changed little or not at all. Many teachers adopted the framework within their existing traditional structures, treating problem solving techniques and the use of manipulative materials as discrete math skills or as a means to help students memorize math tables, rather than as elements to support all sorts of mathematical processes (Cohen and Ball, 1990).

Evidence from *Academic Challenge for the Children of Poverty* also illustrates the difficulties teachers experience when adopting alternative instructional strategies into their teaching repertoire. Teachers who were exposed to alternative instructional methods were likely to employ these methods when provided the flexibility and opportunity, but they usually used these methods in only one subject area and continued to provide a more conventional form of instruction in others (Knapp et al. 1992a,b).

Local schools need ample time, learning opportunities, and support from district and state offices as they prepare to adopt alternative approaches to teaching advanced skills to disadvantaged students. In order to teach educationally disadvantaged students most effectively, many teachers must alter their conceptions about such students' capabilities and change some methods of teaching. Revisions in curriculum needed to increase students' learning of higher-order thinking skills must be accompanied by changes in the methods that are used to present that curriculum. Intensive staff development that emphasizes teachers' classroom skills is needed to develop capacity in teaching more advanced skills.

Coordination

The Chapter 1 Implementation Study (Millsap et al. 1992b) estimates that basic Chapter 1 instruction accounts for only 24 to 30 minutes a day, five days a week. Because Chapter 1 represents only a small portion of a student's day, both Chapter 1 and regular teachers need to learn the most effective methods to instruct at-risk students and to promote higher-order thinking skills. Obviously, the development of these skills cannot be limited to Chapter 1 instruction or to mathematics and reading, the most common subjects in Chapter 1 programs. Higher-order skills must be taught in and applied to all subjects. Furthermore, developing higher-order skills needs to involve the outside environment as well. It is unfair to expect students to attain critical thinking skills if the Chapter 1 program is the only place in which these skills are taught.

Assessment

Chapter 1 program regulations specify that LEAs must assess more advanced skills by identifying specific subtests, such as reading comprehension and mathematics problems and applications, within the standardized tests used to measure aggregate performance. The use of this method to assess higher-order thinking skills is

the subject of considerable debate for a number of reasons:

■ Widely administered standardized tests that may claim to test critical thinking skills may measure only a few abilities.

■ Because these tests attempt to measure thinking that requires an understanding of subtlety, the exercise of judgment, and weighing of alternatives, critics maintain that the tests themselves should involve judgment and interpretation (Resnick 1987). Problems that demand higher-order thinking often have multiple correct solutions. Thus, it is misleading and inappropriate to place these questions in a format that requires a single correct answer.

■ Multiple-choice tests do not reveal the complexity of the thinking processes used to answer the questions.

■ Multiple-choice tests do not consider the influence of students' background on their answers and reasoning (Norris 1989).

Current testing programs, especially those designed for the elementary grades, emphasize basic skills; more advanced content is typically added in later years. Moreover, these tests seem to determine much of the teaching that goes on in our schools. Teachers often use test items as prototypes for the instructional materials they prepare (Beyer 1984). Schools held accountable for student performance naturally orient their curricula around the content of those tests. The use of multiple-choice tests as the primary vehicle for assessing student mastery of the curriculum may unintentionally discourage teachers from focusing curricula around higher-order skills, because such skills are not necessarily the most direct route to producing high scores on tests of basic skills.

Standardized tests may measure aspects of critical thinking, but innovative measures such as performance assessments may be even more accurate. In performance assessments, students are given a task that requires planning, analysis, and execution, and the students are evaluated on the process they use as well as the results.

91

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*



Boris
Cora
Jorja
Mary
Lara
Saba

children think
will change into
children think
will change





America's Children and Their Elementary Schools

By David K. Cohen and S. G. Grant

AMERICA'S CHILDREN SEEM TO HAVE at least one large experience in common—school. They spend roughly one-quarter of their waking hours in classrooms, corridors, lunchrooms, and playgrounds, all under teachers' supervision. But the more we examine that experience, the less common it seems. For instance, we have observed and talked with Crystal Bebee, a young Caucasian woman in her second year of teaching in a large and generally prosperous city on America's West Coast. Her school is in the inner city, and it is a polyglot of racial and ethnic groups: Eleven of her second graders are Hispanic, eight are African-American, and six are Asian. Five are Caucasian. If culture has a significant influence on experience, these students must have wildly different experi-

ences in school, even if they share a great distance from the conventional American mainstream. But if social class has a significant influence on experience, the students must have very similar lives in school. They are all poor; twenty-eight of the thirty students qualify for the free or reduced lunch program.

Just across town we visited a school in an extraordinarily affluent neighborhood. Most of Patricia Cawkins's fifth graders are Caucasians from very wealthy homes. They are more culturally homogeneous than Ms. Bebee's students and seem much closer to the "conventional" mainstream. But several Asian children are in the class, and four Hispanic children from poor families ride buses into the neighborhood as part of a school desegregation program. Ms. Cawkins herself is African-American, and has taught in the school for nearly twenty years.

Such contrasts are common in American education. Jean Bowers has been teaching in a Midwestern industrial city for nearly two decades, and nearly all of her second graders come from poor Appalachian families. Last year there was only one African-American girl and one Native American boy in a class of thirty. Many families subsist on welfare; domestic violence, drugs, broken families, and other problems abound. Paula

93

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A Q&A
Book*

David K. Cohen is John Hannah Professor of Education and Social Policy, Michigan State University. S. G. Grant is a doctoral student and research assistant for the Center for Policy Research in Education, Michigan State University.

"America's Children and Their Elementary Schools" is reprinted by permission of Daedalus, Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, from the issue entitled "America's Childhood," Winter 1993, Vol. 122 No.1.

Goddard teaches second grade just a few miles across town, in a school that enrolls African-American students from poor families. The school is in a run-down, racially segregated neighborhood that is plagued by crime, violence, drugs, poverty, and unemployment. These two classrooms are profoundly different because race plays such a large part in Americans' experience, but they are quite similar in some respects because students in both are poor. They also share a great distance from Joan Sealy's school a few miles away in one of the city's better neighborhoods. Ms. Sealy has taught in the district for more than twenty years, and all of her third graders come from middle-income homes. There are no Hispanics or African-Americans, but three or four children in last year's class came from recent European and Asian immigrant families. When we asked teachers and administrators about social problems in this school, they reported that many mothers worked and that the children were under considerable pressure to achieve.

GIVEN SUCH DIFFERENCES IN CLASS AND culture, can we say that America's children attend common schools? Much evidence from the schools suggests they do not. While students in affluent neighborhoods often attend attractive and well-endowed schools, their counterparts in low-income neighborhoods find themselves in much worse facilities. Ms. Cawkins and her students work in a nicely designed and beautifully landscaped West Coast school, with a large, unfenced outdoor play area and an indoor gym. The library is large and well-stocked, and there is an up-to-date computer lab and a special science facility. Both the library and the science program owe a great deal to the school's aggressive parents' organization, perhaps more than to school district funds. And more than halfway across the country, Ms. Sealy's school could have been designed for Ms. Cawkins' neighborhood. The sleek, one-story wood-and-glass structure sits in the midst of trees and rolling lawns on a large site all its own, in an attractive residential area. The outdoor play area is large and unfenced, and the school's interior is open and colorful. It has a large gym and an ample library that is financed and

The segregation is far from perfect, but a large fraction of America's children attend school with youngsters much like themselves.

staffed by the parents' organization. The surrounding houses are clean and well-kept, the lawns carefully groomed, and the comfortable streets are lined with large trees.

Yet Ms. Bebee and her second graders work in a drab, battered, and severely overcrowded building that is nearly a century old, even though they live in the same city as Ms. Cawkins and her students. Graffiti and broken windows abound, the playground is fenced and locked, and the school is flanked by rows of "portable" classrooms. There is no library, no computer lab, and no science facility. Ms. Bowers's Midwestern school is of the same vintage, though a different genre. It is a classic old-style, big-city school, a large, two-story, formal brick building with vast ceilings, high windows, and yawning hallways. Outside doors to the building are always locked

because drunks regularly roam the streets (some used to wander inside), and armed men intermittently prowl the neighborhood. The school is worn but recently has been tidied up, and is not overcrowded. There is a large room full of new computers, a cafeteria, and a library. There also is a large playground, and a gym. The playground must be carefully patrolled because of neighborhood violence, but the principal keeps a relentless watch and the children play outside in all but the worst weather.

Ms. Goddard's school on the other side of town looks very similar. Though the neighborhood is run down, the old building has been put back into decent condition and has a large playground and an adequate library. It is unusual in one other respect. Several years ago a coalition of African-American parents became convinced that the city schools did not serve their children well and petitioned for a separate school. The district offered this building, the parents accepted, and the result has been quite remarkable. The school was designated as an "alternative" within the system and admission was made selective. Families must apply to the school, and parents must make explicit contracts about helping with students' work and regularly visiting the school. The schools' parents and teachers share a strong commitment to the idea that all students should succeed in school.

These contrasts make it difficult to accept claims that America's young children attend com-

mon schools. School attendance policies, housing practices, and income differences all help to segregate students by either social and economic class, or by ethnicity and race, or both. The segregation is far from perfect, but a large fraction of America's children attend school with youngsters much like themselves, and have little direct experience of any other America. Children whose families are poor, African-American, Hispanic, or recent immigrants from Asia also often find themselves in the oldest facilities that public education has to offer. Some of the buildings are in terrible condition, and even those that have been kept up do not compare with the facilities that one can find in more affluent neighborhoods.

Yet if we look inside classrooms, instruction seems remarkably similar, and claims for common schools thus appear more plausible. For instance, despite the differences between their schools and students, both Ms. Bebee and Ms. Cawkins are serious and responsible teachers. They have presented students with a wide variety of tasks, carefully monitored their work, and offered copious assistance and praise. Much instruction has been organized around individual seatwork. Classroom discourse has been largely teacher-centered and focused on eliciting right answers. They both have treated knowledge by breaking it up into small factual segments and procedures.

These two classrooms closely resemble others that we observed. Ms. Goddard's, Ms. Bowers's, and Ms. Sealy's classes are also quite similar despite great differences among their schools, students, and neighborhoods. All three are teacher-centered, and much of their work has focused on what some call basic skills. A good deal of instruction has consisted of distributing, collecting, and correcting student worksheets in reading and mathematics, and helping students to make their way through the sheets. Whole-class instruction often concerns the worksheets—introducing them, working a few lines together, making corrections, and the like. The only regular occasion on which students have interacted with one another over academic matters has been the ubiquitous reading groups, which are organized by ability. In all three classrooms, these interactions have centered either on teachers' questions and students' terse answers, or on "round robin" reading in which students successively read a few sentences aloud with no discussion.

Is the big news here that American schools frame vast inequalities in class and race, and thus compound children's social and cultural isolation? Or is it that children are offered roughly the same instruction, despite such differences? Social commentators like Horace Mann, W. E. B. Du Bois,

James Coleman, and Christopher Jencks have attacked class or racial inequalities in American society and their effects on children's experience in school. Romantic critics like Thoreau, Twain, Dewey, and Paul Goodman complained about the humdrum routine of formal education and the deadening sameness of children's experience in school. Is elementary education distinguished chiefly for its similarities or gross differences?

Instructional Regularities

The answers to these questions depend partly on what one looks for, and how one looks. Until recently, most commentators on instruction considered only its gross features and reported that classrooms were remarkably similar. One such feature is the way that schools are organized. Nearly all students and teachers work in the familiar eggcrate structure of individual classrooms. Twenty-five or thirty students spend nearly their entire day with a single teacher who offers instruction in all subjects. Students are assigned to single grades by age rather than being grouped in broader age ranges that span three or more years.¹ Most are promoted annually, but not in a group. Students and teachers therefore meet each other afresh each year, and must spend considerable time becoming acquainted, learning to get along together, and reviewing previous work. This regime joins two large liabilities—social and intellectual discontinuity, and much ensuing repetition of work.² Yet it has endured since the late 1800s, persisting through many efforts to promote such alternatives as multi-age grading, continuous progress, team teaching, and subject matter specialization in teaching. It stands in sharp contrast to some other nations, in which the same students and teachers work together for at least several years.

Ability grouping within classes is another common feature of school organization in the United States.³ Most students seem to be grouped for reading and math, often beginning in the first grade. In some cases this means that students who are believed to have similar levels of ability sit and work apart from others. In most reading lessons, for instance, a small group of students of similar ability will be gathered on one side of the class to work with the teacher while everyone else does seatwork. Usually there are three such groups, and a good part of reading instruction consists of the teacher working with one group after the other. But grouping also means that even when the entire class seems to be working as a whole, members of each group are given different levels of work. Teachers often try to disguise these distinctions, but students are well aware of ability group-

ing and the status differences that it entails. What is more, grouping counts. Students in lower groups typically get less demanding and more monotonous work, whether the group is reading together or working with the rest of the class.⁴ Teachers often refer to this practice as "individualizing instruction," and report that it helps them to manage their work. In contrast, primary-grade students in Singapore, Japan, and other nations are not grouped and work on the same curriculum together.

The structure of students' work also is broadly similar across elementary classrooms. Most teachers employ a mixture of seatwork (when students work alone on a written assignment), work in small groups, and whole-class instruction, but seatwork has dominated. An early 1970s study found that on average, slightly more than 70 percent of class time was spent on seatwork.⁵ Most whole-class instruction is either lectures or recitations concerning seatwork.⁶ Serious discussion and sustained projects are rare.

Another similarity in instruction is the mechanical representation of knowledge. School subjects are segmented into seemingly unrelated domains: spelling usually is taught as though it was unrelated to reading and writing; writing has been taught as though it was unrelated to reading; grammar has been taught as though it was distinct from either reading or writing.⁷ Knowledge also is segmented within subjects: children study lists of spelling words, sheets of places to be identified, pages of individual math problems, and the like. One commentator refers to such work as "painting by the numbers."⁸

Most school books and other materials have supported this bits-and-pieces regime. Texts in reading, language arts, spelling, and math have presented knowledge in this fractured fashion, as have most worksheets for seatwork.⁹ All of the teachers whom we discussed at the outset of this paper used such materials. Though the lists and sheets often puzzle learners, they are not intellectually complex: most teaching and learning concentrate on surface knowledge.¹⁰ In reading, for example, teachers typically have focused on simple conceptions of the action in stories rather than trying to mine the meanings of text.¹¹ The stories themselves are bland, and intellectual controversy is unfamiliar. While teachers in some other

Sustained discussion is quite rare in elementary schools, and students infrequently talk with one another as part of instruction.

nations routinely encourage students to make conjectures about the meaning of text, to question others' conjectures, and to support their ideas with argument and textual evidence, such work has been rare in U.S. elementary schools.¹² Discussion, explanation, and justification of arguments are also uncommon in mathematics. Teachers and students usually treat knowledge as though it was fixed and given by authorities, not as though it was contested, constructed, and reconstructed in the search for understanding.¹³

Classroom discourse is also similar across elementary classrooms. Teachers question and students respond. Teachers lecture and students listen. After studying more than a thousand classrooms, John Goodlad concluded that "explaining and lecturing were the most common activities."¹⁴ Teachers outtalk students by at least three to one.¹⁵ Most discourse also is intellectually convergent—i.e., teachers fish for "right answers" which students typically offer up in single words, numbers, or short phrases. Often the work is so simple and predictable that students give the answer before teachers finish the question. Sustained discussion is quite rare in elementary schools, and students infrequently talk with one another as part of instruction.

Teachers' domination of instructional discourse is consistent with their other uses of authority. Traditionally they have managed nearly all of classroom life, from lining up for lunch to parsing sentences. Even though we think of this as a democratic and egalitarian society, authority is quite centralized in classrooms. In John Goodlad's study, more than one-half of elementary school students reported that they did not participate at all in choosing what they did in class.¹⁶ Classroom authority is much more broadly diffused in societies that we think of as more hierarchical and authoritarian. Japanese students, for example, are taught to jointly manage a great deal of their lives and work together in school, and teachers deliberately avoid trying to manage everything in their classes.¹⁷

Reports of these similarities come from schools in rural areas, affluent suburbs, and central cities. Instruction seems quite homogeneous across large demographic and economic differences. It also seems dull. Most observers portray elementary

classrooms as drab, often boring, pitched at a low intellectual level, and largely controlled by teachers.¹⁸ Students are passive. Yet few observers report that classroom life is harsh. Many teachers maintain tight control, but they frame it in an energetically happy manner. Some of the cheer is relentless, a "classroom management" tactic, but most teachers seem friendly, genuinely concerned about children, and encouraging. Few seem capricious, cruel, or cynical.¹⁹ Even in neighborhoods that are plagued by poverty, violence, and social pathology, many schools offer children a relatively safe refuge and source of help. That certainly was true of Ms. Bebee's, Ms. Bowers's, and Ms. Goddard's schools.

One would like to know how all this seems to children, but despite freight loads of research on schools and teaching, researchers rarely have inquired about how students see and understand school. Children's writing about school, of which there must have been a good deal, appears not to have been collected, studied or published. The few reports that do exist are paradoxical: most young children seem compliant, often friendly, and even eager participants in classrooms. John Goodlad wrote:

... having depicted a general picture of considerable passivity among students ... I hasten to point out that students' views of life in their classrooms were not correspondingly negative. Rather, they tended to express liking for their subjects, view most teachers as concerned about them, and view most teachers as liking or even being enthusiastic about their work. Large percentages expressed liking for the dominating classroom activity of listening to their teachers.²⁰

Despite a regime that offends many observers, most young students report that they like school and find it pleasant.²¹

Instructional Differences

The vignettes with which we began revealed some extraordinary educational disparities, but they are only the beginning. One set of differences arises because American public schools have fewer elements of common purpose and less common curriculum, assessment, and teacher education than most other nations. Our schools are politically quite decentralized, the market plays a comparatively large role and the state a modest one in U.S. education, and Americans are more divided about educational purpose and content than many other peoples. Hence publishers, school systems, schools, and teachers have greater latitude here than in many other systems. For instance, while texts are ubiquitous their content differs considerably. A recent study showed that fourth-grade

math textbooks often gave the same topics different treatments, and each covered topics that others ignored. Similarly, when fourth grade math achievement tests covered the same topics, they often did so differently and they frequently dealt with somewhat different topics. Most important, tests often covered topics differently than texts. The curriculum that teachers offer seems to vary remarkably despite similar pedagogy. Teachers who present arithmetic in quite conventional and mechanical ways differ in how they cover topics. They may all teach long division, but they present it differently, use different problems, and allocate time to it quite differently. Such differences occur even when teachers use the same textbook.²² In contrast, in Japan, Singapore, France, and other nations, materials and examinations are more closely coordinated and have much more common content,²³ and classroom content coverage appears to be much more homogeneous.²⁴

Teacher's habits and decisions are important in any system of instruction. But ... [U.S.] students' and teachers' preferences are not informed by a plain system of common purposes and content. Classrooms around the world are of course traditional in form as well, often much more so than in the U.S. But classrooms here exhibit a distinctive sort of diffuse, academically relaxed traditionalism. Teachers' work is guided more by inherited practices and individual decisions than by any clear and common view of what is to be covered, how it is to be covered, and why. In this sense, American schools have the worst of both worlds.²⁵

A second set of differences in education arises from disparities in wealth and taste among local school districts. In many countries, schools get roughly equal monies from central ministries, but U.S. public education depends heavily on local voters' decisions to tax themselves. The local share of educational expenditures has been declining for decades, but local taxes still contribute a little more than one-half of the total local school revenues, on average. Since most districts use the property tax as their chief revenue source, and since both property wealth and the willingness to tax it vary widely among jurisdictions, local expenditures for schooling vary widely. State aid eases this situation somewhat; on average about 45 percent of local school revenues come from state government, and states use some of that to "equalize" among districts.²⁶ But great inequalities remain in most states, despite dozens of lawsuits, many weighty reports, and nearly three decades of struggle. The reasons are both political and fiscal. Less inequality would require substantial redistribution of state monies, additional state money, restrictions on local spending, or some combination of these measures. It is difficult to find money for

such a cause, in part because it is even more difficult to find broad political support for redistribution.

Schools in poorer districts thus have less to spend, and they can buy less quality in education, as that is commonly understood. They typically pay teachers lower salaries and thus attract candidates with weaker formal qualifications. They also offer less diversified curricula and educational programs, and have less attractive facilities and instructional materials. Big city schools often are thought to suffer the most from these inequalities, but all sorts of districts are relatively poor, including many rural towns, working-class suburbs, and districts with little industry or many tax-exempt institutions. Indeed, from some angles the resource picture in big city schools looks surprisingly good. Historically they seem much better off than they were three or four decades ago because all public schools are better off. Average expenditures for public education increased from about \$1,100 per pupil in 1950 to \$5,200 per pupil in 1990. That was more than a four-fold increase in four decades, and most ships rose on the tide.²⁷ Additionally, the federal Chapter I program and related state programs directed money to schools that enroll students from disadvantaged circumstances, and many of those students live in older, larger cities. Thanks to Chapter I and related state programs, for example, Ms. Bowers's old and worn-down school has a computer room that seems as well-equipped as the one in Ms. Sealy's newer and much more attractive building. In fact, some schools in poor neighborhoods now have larger operating budgets per pupil than schools in the same districts that enroll students from middle-class homes. One analyst estimates that schools in Los Angeles with heavy enrollments of disadvantaged students probably spend one-third more per pupil than other schools in the same city that enroll students from middle-class homes.²⁸ Researchers in Chicago report that a similar situation is developing there.²⁹

WE ATTEND TO FISCAL INEQUALITIES because they produce differences in school resources that commonly are thought to affect students' performance, but those relationships have become less clear over the past three decades. It was long thought that differences in learning were caused by differences in books, class size, qualified teachers, facilities, and other resources that money bought. Schools in well-to-do communities that spent plentifully on education got qualified teachers, fine facilities and educational materials, and students therefore achieved relatively well. Schools in poorer communities

spent less, got less qualified teachers, poorer materials, and less well-equipped schools, and students therefore achieved relatively poorly. Just what teachers, facilities, and materials did to enhance or impede achievement was unexplored, partly because schools were seen as powerful institutions that worked simply: Added monies purchased better school resources and better school resources created better achievement, irrespective of differences in students' social and economic backgrounds.

Large-scale studies of schooling carried out between the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s told a different story. James Coleman and Christopher Jencks argued that what counted for education was the educational resources that students brought to school, not the schools' resources. Students whose families and communities had many social and cultural advantages arrived in class with plenty of educational resources. They found it relatively easy to make good use of what schools offered, and on average did relatively well on various measures of academic achievement. But students whose families and communities had fewer social and cultural advantages arrived with fewer educational resources. As a result they found it relatively difficult to make good use of what schools offered, and tended to do relatively poorly on tests and other measures of academic achievement. But if differences in school facilities, educational materials, and teachers' qualifications were found to be unrelated to differences in students' achievement, differences in schools' social composition seem quite important.³⁰ Students who attended school with others from more advantaged families did better than students whose classmates were from less advantaged families. Coleman, Jencks, and others portrayed the social and economic status that children inherited as relatively powerful and schools as relatively powerless.³¹ That idea deeply troubled educators, liberals, and advocates for minority-group or poor children. But if researchers saw the sources of academic achievement very differently, their new idea was no less simple than the older one: Added student resources created added achievement, irrespective of differences in school resources.

Studies that have been carried out since the mid-1970s permit us to paint still another picture, in which *both* schools' and students' resources count, but in more complex ways than earlier inquiries suggest. Many researchers now argue that how schools mobilize their educational resources is as significant as the resources that children bring to school. A variety of recent studies claim that teachers' actions and beliefs are crucially important to students' performance. For

example, some elementary school teachers have coherent strategies for instruction and deploy lessons, books, and other resources in ways that are consistent with those strategies. They believe that their students can learn and that they have a large responsibility to help. They have definite objectives which instruction is organized to achieve. Though typically quite traditional and didactic, lessons are well thought out, well organized, and well paced. Teachers regularly check to determine how well students are doing, whether some need more work, and the like. In these and other ways, teachers work hard to make educationally fruitful connections with students. Typically they use the same conventional pedagogy and the same sorts of tests, worksheets, texts, and seatwork that we described earlier, but they use them as part of a well-crafted strategy to improve children's learning.³²

In contrast, many other teachers do not seem to have a coherent strategy for instruction, and they deploy resources in a scattered and inconsistent fashion. They have vague objectives, and their lessons are not well thought out and seem disorganized. Classroom work is poorly paced, and teachers either do not regularly check to see how students are doing, or if they do check, they do not make many midcourse corrections to accommodate students' responses. John Goodlad reported that more than half of the elementary students in his study said that they "did not know what they were supposed to do in class."³³ Teachers of this sort do not exert themselves to make educationally fruitful connections with students; many act as though they believed that their responsibility was only to "present the material," and to let students get it if they can. And when such teachers work with children from disadvantaged circumstances, they often act as though they believed that students could handle only watered-down instruction.

There also is growing evidence that schools' collective characteristics significantly influence instructional effectiveness. Faculty and students in some schools share a vision of the purposes of instruction and a commitment to success—Ms. Goddard's school is a case in point. Teachers believe that they have an obligation to help students succeed, there is considerable collegiality,

Students in lower groups tend to get thinner, slower, and less rich instruction.

extensive contact between teachers and students in class and outside, and high morale. Schools of this sort approximate communities in which students and teachers evince a strong sense of responsibility for their own actions and for the common good. Many other schools are fragmented and anomic. Teachers, staff, and students share no common vision of instructional purposes, and have little common commitment to success. There is little collegiality, little contact among teachers and students outside of class, and morale often is low. On average, students in schools of the first sort do better than students in schools of the second sort.³⁴

No one denies that students' educational resources are very important. Many children from socially and economically advantaged circumstances arrive in school able to read and even write, and

find it easy to do well with the instruction that schools offer, even if it is routine and dull, or makes little apparent sense. But many students from much less advantaged circumstances come to school with more modest educational resources. Though often bright and curious, many have not learned to read or to write at home. They often receive little help with schoolwork, or lack enough food in the morning or a quiet space in which to read or do homework after school. Some grow up in such difficult circumstances that they arrive in school with little motivation to succeed, already alienated or openly hostile.³⁵

But many researchers now argue that these circumstances are not the sole or even chief cause of poor achievement. If students from disadvantaged circumstances come to school relatively poorly prepared to capitalize on conventional instruction, most schools are ill prepared to help these students. The students do not know how to deal with adults and conventional schoolwork; the teachers do not know how to organize books, lessons, and other conventional resources of education to take advantage of the curiosity and intelligence that most students initially bring to school. That mutual incapacity is crippling for many students and defeating for many teachers. It is complicated by ability groups, because students in lower groups tend to get thinner, slower, and less rich instruction, they have fewer opportunities to learn, and they learn less.³⁶ Moreover, the most disadvantaged students tend to be placed in the lowest

99

American Federation of Teachers: A QuEST Reader

groups with others like themselves. That is particularly troubling, for students are educational resources for each other as well as for themselves. Hence less advantaged students, who bring fewer educational resources to school, are likely not only to have thinner instruction but also fewer social resources of education. No malicious intent need be supposed: interactions between vast inequalities in American society and routine operations in schools are explanation enough.³⁷ The typical result is a pattern of growing disparities in school achievement: The longer students from disadvantaged circumstances stay in school, the further they fall behind their more advantaged peers. Present estimates are that roughly 40 percent of America's children are "educationally disadvantaged."³⁸

These lines of inquiry have led commentators to think about educational resources quite differently. Rather than focusing chiefly on instructional materials, facilities, and teachers' formal qualifications, researchers increasingly attend to the ethical commitments, knowledge, and skills that guide teachers' use of materials and facilities. They also have broadened the notion of educational resources to embrace various collective attributes of schools and classrooms, including leadership, shared goals, collegiality, and the organization of instruction. These shifts mark a continuing movement in scholarly and professional interest away from conventional conceptions of educational resources that focus on broad formal categories like family status, teachers' qualifications, and schools' facilities, toward particular instructional practices and organizational arrangements, and the knowledge, skill, and organization that they entail.³⁹ They also mark a continuing tendency to define resources in terms of their salience to outcomes, rather than assuming such connections. These changes do not deny the significance of instructional materials, facilities, and teachers' formal qualifications, but they imply that their salience depends on how teachers deploy them.

Hence while school resources matter, they matter in a more complex fashion than previously had been thought. If these ideas stand up to further scrutiny, educators and policymakers will have a much more satisfactory sense than before about what educational resources are and how they work. But as educational resources have been specified

Things were simpler when dollars, books, and facilities seemed to count.

more fully, they have become less familiar and commonsensical, more subtle, and less tangible. If educators and policymakers wind up knowing much more about how schools work, they are likely to puzzle more about how to manage them. Things were simpler when dollars, books, and facilities seemed to count.

The investigations outlined above also have produced new ideas and arguments about school improvement. There is strong evidence that test scores rose for many students from disadvantaged circumstances as a result of a national movement to increase "basic skills" that took shape in the mid-1970s. Reformers promoted curriculum mandates, minimum competency tests, "effective schools," and "direct instruction," especially in districts with many

poor and minority-group children. Between 1971 and 1988, black-white reading score differences in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) were cut in half for thirteen-year-olds, and they were cut by one-third for nine-year-olds. The disparity in mathematics achievement also was reduced by nearly half for thirteen-year-olds, and by slightly less than one-third for nine-year-olds. But large disparities remained. In 1988, roughly 80 percent of white nine-year-olds had at least "beginning skills and understanding" in mathematics, but after all the improvement in African-American students' scores, only slightly more than 50 percent of African-American nine-year-olds performed at the level of "beginning skills and understanding" in mathematics. Roughly the same proportions held for thirteen-year-olds.⁴⁰

If the gains seem clear, commentators disagree about their meaning. Some believe they reflect better schooling, but others argue that social policy changes in the 1970s—i.e., general reductions in poverty, better housing, and improved welfare assistance—probably improved school performance for African-American and Hispanic children.⁴¹ Others argue that the NAEP results reflect superficial teaching to the tests rather than more substantial basic skills instruction. Still others focus on continuing inequalities in achievement despite more money for schools that serve students from disadvantaged circumstances. They argue that unequal achievement persists because school improvement has been spotty and many



added expenditures have been nonstrategic. One key reason is that programs to improve education for students from disadvantaged circumstances typically do not package funds wisely. The new monies arrive in targeted mandates that require spending on something specific, like classroom aides, or special project staff, or transportation. Such mandates often produce bizarre results, like classrooms with the required special staff or services but without adequate books and other materials. Much of the increased money also has been used simply to raise teachers' salaries, or to hire more teachers, even though researchers already had found that such expenditures were unrelated to student achievement.⁴²

Another key reason that achievement disparities persist is that most efforts to reduce them have been fragmentary. They focused on a single intervention like parent education, preschool programs, direct tutoring, classroom aides, or special curricula. Students sometimes learned more than otherwise would have been expected, but the effects were either not large, not sustained, or both. More comprehensive interventions seemed to have larger and more lasting effects. They combined several elements—such as parent education, direct tutoring, and special curricula—into coherent programs that dealt with the varied problems that students and teachers had. Such broad and sustained interventions can dramatically improve education for students from disadvantaged circumstances, but they are much more time-consuming, expensive, and difficult to organize than single-shot efforts.⁴³ Less focused and thinner efforts have more modest results but are easier and cheaper, and thus more popular.

Instruction Revisited

All of this suggests that our earlier portrait of homogeneity in instruction was incomplete. While curriculum, pedagogy, and instructional materials are relatively similar in most elementary schools, they also differ in many other ways. Students in lower ability groups have fewer opportunities to learn, and they learn less. Students in Chapter I classes may have similar experiences. Instructional materials often are unequally distributed: while nearly all classrooms have texts, schools in poorer districts tend to have older books. Classrooms also differ within districts in how many other books are on hand. Ms. Sealy's students had more than one hundred mostly new volumes, but a few miles across town Ms. Bowers's students had only a few dozen old, tattered books. Moreover, there are significant differences in teachers' and schools' capacities to

101

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

BRUCE GILBERT

effectively use the instructional resources they have. Some students from disadvantaged circumstances have remarkably constructive educational experiences—for instance, Ms. Goddard's alternative school has raised average test scores from the bottom of the city's heap nearly to the very top, roughly equalling scores in Ms. Sealy's school. That is an astonishing reversal in only a few years, and a remarkable achievement for the school considering the advantages that students in Ms. Sealy's school have. But it is unusual. Ms. Bowers's school has improved, but not nearly as much as Ms. Goddard's, and teaching and learning continue much more dismally in most of the city's other Chapter I schools.

Finally, we must note two sorts of classrooms to which our analysis does not apply. At one extreme are unsafe or damaging classes in which students are out of control, or teachers are thoroughly incompetent or cruel, or both. Informed observers in several big cities estimate that about 5 percent of elementary classes fall into this category, and that they disproportionately enroll African-American or Hispanic children from poor families.⁴⁴ At the other extreme are unusually rich and unconventional classrooms. Instruction in them is more demanding than usual, and less didactic. Students read deeply, textbooks are less in evidence, extended academic projects are common, and students often pursue complex independent or small-group work. Teachers are better educated than is typical, and many avidly continue their studies. Classrooms of this sort are uncommon. Though sometimes found in big cities, and even in their poorest neighborhoods, they seem to occur more often in well-to-do suburbs like Winnetka, Shaker Heights, Newton, and Brookline, and in some elite independent schools. We know of no estimate of the incidence of such instruction, but we would be surprised if it exceeded 2 percent of elementary classrooms.

Change in Instruction

One other crucial feature of contemporary life in elementary schools is change in instruction. Nearly all of the teachers whom we discussed at the outset recently made remarkable revisions in what they teach, how they teach, and how they understand teaching and learning. For example, Ms. Sealy's Midwestern school adopted a very different curriculum, in which reading is envisioned as making sense of text instead of as a collection of isolated facts and skills that are learned by rote. The basal readers, with predictable pasteurized stories, are gone. Now students read real stories and other more substantial material. That is a

huge change for Ms. Sealy, but it is only the beginning. The ability groups in which she once read with a few students while others did seatwork also are gone. Most reading instruction now is done with the whole class. She tries to get everyone to participate in discussions of literature, to help them make sense of text, to sharpen their understanding and appreciation by figuring out what they think a passage means, explaining their ideas, discussing them with others, and revising their views in light of evidence and argument.

The chief occasion for this change was her school's decision to try out a new reading text series that is oriented to literature and comprehension of text instead of phonics. That change sprang from a major shift in opinion among reading specialists and researchers, away from a vision of reading instruction as drill and practice on skills and facts toward an emphasis on complex thought and interpretation. The state education department had embraced the new vision in its pronouncements about curriculum and instruction, and had invited the schools to follow suit. It organized workshops for local educators, and revised state achievement tests. Ms. Sealy reports that her students are quite engaged with the new approach. She says that they "love the books," and are much more excited by their classwork than students ever were before. During one of our visits she wondered aloud how she ever taught differently for all those years, and seemed a bit disappointed at all the missed opportunities.

Ms. Patricia Cawkins works in a much larger city in a West Coast state, yet her teaching has changed in quite similar ways. She too uses a new "literature-based" text that her district recently adopted in response to new ideas about reading and a revised state policy. Her basal readers also are gone. The last time we visited, the class was reading several novels. Ms. Cawkins has also changed the pace and organization of instruction. District officials told teachers that they are no longer expected to finish the textbook, and encouraged them to create larger and more complex units around particular stories or novels. Ms. Cawkins quickly took advantage of this. For instance, while reading *North to Freedom* she asked students to write letters to the main character, to create free-hand maps of Europe tracing his route, and to write daily diary entries from his perspective. The discourse in Ms. Cawkins's class has changed. She asked students more sophisticated questions, inviting them to draw inferences from text rather than recite facts. Some of her queries were more open-ended than before—for example, she asked students to predict upcoming events in a story as a way to help them think about the story line.

One might expect such things for the relatively privileged children whom Ms. Sealy and Ms. Cawkins teach, but Ms. Bebee is following a similar course in her shabby inner-city school. She has eliminated ability groups in reading and thrown away the basal reader. She does most instruction with the whole class. Like Ms. Sealy and Ms. Cawkins, these changes were associated with a shift in state policy, with broader changes in research and professional knowledge, and with the district's adoption of a new "literature-based" text series. Her Hispanic, African-American, Asian, and Caucasian students now talk about what stories mean, why characters act as they do, and how a story's setting helps them to understand what is happening. She reports that she has much more flexibility and no longer rushes to "finish the book" at a story-a-week pace. The units that she teaches are larger and include more related readings and activities. For example, the class read "Jack and the Beanstalk" in the new text's fairy tale section, but Ms. Bebee then dug up three other versions of the story, each with a different ending. She read them with her students, encouraging them to compare the stories and discuss the similarities and differences. She also had the class read several related stories, like "The Giant Who Threw Tantrums," and she created several related writing activities, for example, "If you planted some magic seeds, what would they grow?" She developed art projects for the students on related topics, and even had students plant seeds in paper cups and observe them. Though Ms. Bebee's students come from very poor families, their reading and writing lessons are more rich and lively than those of many more privileged children.

MS. PAULA GODDARD, WHO TEACHES disadvantaged African-American students, has made many similar changes in her Midwestern classroom. She had taught a didactic, skills-based curriculum for several years as part of the school's effort to raise students' achievement. Like her colleagues, she organized reading around a basal text. She did all of the skill exercises with students and supplemented them with worksheets on phonics. There were five ability groups for reading, and little of the work had anything to do with understanding or interpreting

Given the usual fare in America's elementary classrooms, these are remarkable changes.

text. But now most instruction is done with the entire class. Ms. Goddard also abandoned the old system in which students of lower ability had less challenging and interesting reading. All students now use the same reader and discuss the stories together. Ms. Goddard's questions about the stories are often more open-ended, and the class discussions are more extended.

Given the usual fare in America's elementary classrooms, these are remarkable changes. They are connected to an equally remarkable movement for school reform. In the last six or eight years, educators, politicians, and business leaders have argued that students must become independent thinkers and enterprising problem solvers, that

schools should offer intellectually challenging instruction that is deeply rooted in the academic disciplines. These proposals were built on several decades of research in which investigators rejected simple behaviorist pictures of learning as the accumulation of discrete facts and skills, and sketched a view in which judgment, complex thought, and content figured prominently. Reformers also are trying to create state and national instructional frameworks, curricula, and examination systems that would embody much more common and demanding standards. They are trying to create a national system of teacher certification that embodies much more demanding standards for content and pedagogy. These unprecedented ideas have begun to find significant support among state and national agencies. The California State Department of Education has been urging such ideas on schools there since 1985, as are several other states. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics has launched a campaign to replace rote memorization of facts and procedures with deep understanding of mathematical ideas in all American schools. Researchers and reformers concerned with reading and writing are pressing a parallel approach in schools across the country. Professional associations and disciplinary groups are writing new curricula and instructional standards, publishers have begun to produce richer texts, and novel examinations—that would be much less superficial and would assess a broader range of knowledge than standardized tests—are being designed. Recent opinion surveys even suggest that national curricula and tests have broad support among American adults.⁴⁵

103
*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

These new ambitions are encouraging for anyone who hopes children might have intellectually more substantial lives in school, and our vignettes suggest that things have begun to change. But no one knows how far the changes have spread, or how long they will continue. It seems very likely that if the reforms do continue, teachers will face many difficulties, for taking the reform agenda seriously will place enormous demands on their knowledge and skills. Few are familiar with literature, let alone literary theory, and few read regularly or deeply. As a result, most teachers working on their own might not be able to move very far beyond the sorts of changes that we already observed. For instance, though the teachers whom we have observed more often discuss books and stories, most of this work has been relatively superficial. Many tend to focus on surface features of the action, setting, and characters, rather than probing what stories mean or how characters are developed. And reading is most teachers' strongest suit. Few are literate in mathematics, and fewer still know much about science, so change in these subjects would be even more difficult.⁴⁶

Another difficulty for teachers is that reformers want students to become active, engaged, and collaborative learners who grapple with deep problems in academic subjects. Yet even if teachers learned much more about those subjects, they would not necessarily know how to teach in this way. After all, universities are full of professors who know their material deeply yet teach didactically and encourage students to learn passively. In order to promote active, engaged, and collaborative learning, teachers must know how to set problems that will be fruitful and engaging for students, which is more difficult than merely assigning pages to read or the problems at the end of the chapter.⁴⁷ They have to know how to help students to work on those problems without either doing it for them or letting them sink. They have to know how to use some students' work to help others to learn. In effect, teachers would have to organize instruction so that students produced much more of it. As teachers become coaches or conductors, and abandon more familiar and didactic roles in which they "tell knowledge," students would have to become much more active, thoughtful, and hard-working, and abandon their present less taxing role as passive absorbers of predigested knowledge.

This is a large agenda for change. It is easy to see that many teachers whom we have been visiting have begun to change, but it is difficult to agree on the scope and significance of what they have done. In light of past practices, teachers seem to have taken giant steps in a new direction, but

viewed in light of reformers' aspirations, it looks as though they have barely begun. Though Ms. Cawkins uses very different materials, has abandoned ability groups, and conducts whole-class reading lessons, her discussions feature many literal recall questions. Her spelling lessons use lists of words that have been selected from the stories and books students are reading, but the lessons still focus quite traditionally on drill and practice of words isolated from any use in text. There are important new structures and materials in this class, but they are framed by old ideas and practices. Many other classes present a similar picture. If we watched them through a one-way mirror and had only the video channel open, they would seem very different because the organization has changed from ability groups to whole-class work. But if we could only listen to the discourse, things would sound very much like past practice because the discourse structure and treatment of knowledge are so similar. Tuning in both the audio and video produces a result that seems full of contradictions.

MANY REFORMERS WOULD SAY THAT teachers simply need to learn more so they could ask more thoughtful questions and respond more adequately to students' comments. But teachers' opportunities to learn are in distressingly short supply. Few elementary schools offer teachers many chances to improve their practice, and most continuing university education programs for teachers have a dismal reputation. Undergraduate education rarely offers intending elementary teachers extended opportunities to learn deeply about the subjects they will teach or how to teach thoughtfully and responsibly.⁴⁸ Reformers argue that changes should be made in schools and higher education to open up sufficient opportunities for teachers to learn, but most of those institutions lack the resources, dispositions, or incentives to change. They also argue for the creation of new agencies for teacher education as part of reform itself, but that would be an immense task, perhaps no easier than changing the existing institutions.⁴⁹

These problems are more puzzling when one considers students from disadvantaged circumstances. There are some encouraging signs in our earlier stories about Ms. Bebee and Ms. Goddard. Both teachers have made significant changes despite difficult circumstances. Both have learned a great deal in a short time, and both seem disposed to learn more. But both teachers retain many didactic features in their practice, and much of their reading teaching looks like old wine in new bottles. For example, Ms. Bowers's ideas

about reading have changed dramatically in the last few years, due in part to her studies for a master's degree at a local university. She had seen reading quite conventionally, as nothing but little bundles of discrete facts and skills that students learned, each by itself, by rote. She thought that the standard three or four reading groups made sense, and was a devotee of basal texts. But she now believes that reading is a matter of understanding text rather than memorizing isolated skills and facts. She seems quite convinced that it is best for children to learn to make sense of text, to interpret what they read, to ask and answer questions about the meaning of text as they read along.

But Ms. Bowers does not teach reading as she thinks it should be taught. Though she uses a few of the reform ideas, most of her teaching is quite traditional. Her class has three or four ability groups, she relies heavily on basal readers, and instruction focuses on drill and practice of basic skills. One reason is that her school system has a rigid scheme for guiding instruction that is keyed to a basic skills curriculum, and specifies what is to be taught each week in each grade. Ms. Bowers says that if she taught reading as she now believes it should be taught, some of her students would learn much more about reading and would like it more. But she thinks they probably would not do well on the tests that were designed with a much more traditional conception of reading in mind. She would then be in trouble with the principal, and he would be in trouble with the central office.

Many teachers face similar impediments. Some work in districts with instructional schemes like those in Ms. Bowers's district, most of which were devised during the back-to-basics crusade. Others work in districts that have rigidly structured Chapter I programs that are focused on basic skills instruction, and thus would make it difficult for teachers to take a more thoughtful and flexible approach. Though many states and localities are adopting new approaches to reading, few have revised their Chapter I programs. There are some proposals to radically change this program, but that would require the repeal of an entire generation of state and federal regulations and guidelines, and the disestablishment of many institu-

But Ms. Bowers does not teach reading as she thinks it should be taught.

tions and social arrangements that were created to support a highly structured approach to instruction and a simplified administrative order. It also would require that teachers and administrators unlearn the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that make sense in the established basic skills curriculum, and that they learn everything that a new education might require. New institutions and arrangements that would support a very different and much more demanding approach to instruction also would have to be invented.

But Ms. Bowers has a larger problem. She is not at all sure that she would teach differently even if those institutional difficulties were swept away. She points out that most of her students are the offspring of poor families from Appalachia and many have serious problems. Nearly everyone is poor, many of the children are

abused or neglected, and few do well in school. Ms. Bowers is unsure whether they would do better with a much more ambitious approach to reading. She thinks that some would but most would not. Despite what she heard while studying for her master's degree, she thinks that many of her students would have much more trouble with a more flexible and demanding curriculum, and that some would sink entirely.

Ms. Bowers is not unique. Like many teachers in disadvantaged neighborhoods, she thinks that her students begin with few of the social resources that commonly support excellent instruction. They come from families that have little education, and often have been on welfare for generations. Many have teenage mothers, or come from chronically unemployed single-parent families, or both. More and more come from homeless families, or have drug-addicted parents, or are abused, or some combination of these. Many were born underweight or malnourished, and an unknown number have been damaged before birth by crack cocaine and alcohol. Their neighborhoods pulsate with increasingly violent crime.⁵⁰ Like many teachers, Ms. Bowers thinks that her students need structured, predictable, and stable lives in school because the rest of their lives are so chaotic.

Past, Present, and Prospect

Like the teachers whom we have been observing, we are puzzled about the prospects for further change. One reason is the difficulties that we just

105

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

discussed. Another is that the precedents for change are unclear: though public schools have altered quite dramatically in some respects, they have changed little in others. Classroom culture and organization have changed most remarkably. In 1880, students' desks and chairs were bolted down in rows facing front. Discipline was so tight that students needed individual permission for a trip to the bathroom. Students and teachers addressed each other formally, and teachers dressed formally. Classrooms slowly grew less regimented through the twentieth century, a development that picked up speed in the 1960s and early 1970s. Teachers are more considerate of children than they were nine decades ago, discipline has greatly relaxed, and the tone of classrooms is much less formal. The furniture is movable, and is often moved to accommodate activities. Many elementary students now sit in "cooperative learning" groups of four or five, facing each other. Teachers dress much more casually. Students have appreciably more autonomy; they are able to move around more freely to do their work, and most seem able to go to the bathroom when they wish. In many classrooms they also enter and leave at their own initiative to attend special classes or other activities. Even teachers who describe themselves as stern disciplinarians tolerate noise, side conversations, and mischief that would have been quickly stamped out a generation or two ago. These might seem trivial changes to adults in the 1990s, but they would seem revolutionary to teachers and students who were visiting from the 1940s.⁵¹

Classroom discourse also has been altered quite remarkably. In 1900, students and teachers typically worked within a rigid recitation format.⁵² Teachers put questions to individual students who were expected to answer on the spot. A great premium was placed on speed and precision, and the entire exercise was conducted at a brisk clip.⁵³ There was little or no room for students to amplify a point, let alone to ask questions or discuss the matter. Students usually had to stand when called on to speak, and often were graded on posture and deportment. Recitations now are a much diminished feature of the elementary landscape, and when they do occur, they are much less formal. Additionally, students often manage more of their own instruction.

Teaching has begun to change, but it will take extraordinary efforts to sustain and extend the new work.

The materials of instruction have changed as well. There are many more texts, supplementary works, and trade books for children than there were in the 1950s. These materials are much more diverse in style, format, content, and intended audience than ever before. They also are better designed and more attractively presented than anything that was available in the 1950s, let alone in 1900. In addition, new instructional media—television, radio, audiotape, videotape, and computers—are making their way into classrooms, and some open up astonishing instructional possibilities.

But if these changes seem to augur well for reformers today, several other features of instruction have persisted more or less intact for at least a century. The inherited egg-crate, age-graded organization of school life is intact, and so is the snapshot approach to topic definition and content coverage. Conceptions of knowledge seem little changed. While the recitation has receded in formality and importance, the bits-and-pieces intellectual regime that it accompanied is still dominant. Discourse is much less rigid, but students typically take little intellectual initiative and teachers still control the conversation. Authority is more relaxed in classrooms, but teachers are very much in charge.⁵⁴ New and often exciting materials and media generally are used within the inherited intellectual regime.⁵⁵

Reformers thus have had much more success changing the culture and social organization of classrooms, and the quality of educational materials, than they have had changing the core features of instruction. One reason is that changes in classroom culture and social organization were supported by parallel shifts in American social life, but there has been no broad social support for change in the core of academic instruction. Yet such change is exactly what the recent reforms would require.

Another reason that we are puzzled about the prospects for further change concerns the political and economic circumstances of reform. The current proposals for change began to catch Americans' imagination just as our institutions began to stagger under the economic legacy of the Reagan years. Several years of recession following federal budget cuts have produced massive fiscal

shortfalls in many states and localities, and education and social service budgets are being slashed. California's state government has led the reforms, but it just struggled through two years of dramatic cuts in education, and greater reductions are expected. Additionally, the incentives to work hard in school are weak for many students. Many skilled and semiskilled workers have lost jobs in manufacturing and have had to take unskilled work in service industries. Many high school graduates can look forward either to similar prospects or no work at all. Youth unemployment is high everywhere, and appallingly high in African-American and Hispanic neighborhoods.

The prospects for further change thus seem quite mixed. An impressive intellectual agenda is developing for public education, and ambitious new standards and assessments seem to promise a better and more challenging life in schools. Teaching has begun to change, but it will take extraordinary efforts to sustain and extend the new work. Indeed, it would take a considerable effort for most schools simply to do a much better job of conventional instruction with conventionally advantaged children. More unusual measures would be required to do a much better job of conventional instruction in schools that enroll the children whom America traditionally has neglected or rejected. Truly astonishing efforts would be required to radically reform instruction for those children. That is the most worrisome prospect now. Educators and reformers are increasingly committed to ambitious ideas about instruction, but they work in an appallingly unequal society, in which the incentives for thoughtful instruction are mixed at best, with a weakly educated teaching force during a period of shrinking budgets and increasing social distress. Should the recent reforms continue, advantaged students will have a much easier time making use of them than students from disadvantaged families. Lacking quite remarkable efforts by schools and other social institutions, radical educational reform probably would improve instruction for some American

children, but at the price of increasingly unequal achievement.

Acknowledgments

We thank Deborah Loewenburg Ball, Jere Brophy, Susan Fuhrman, Michael Levine, Barbara Neufeld, Allan Odden, Aaron Pallas, Penelope Peterson, Marshall Smith, Lauren Young, and Suzanne Wilson for their helpful comments on earlier drafts. Several contributors to this volume also raised useful questions at the meeting during which draft essays were discussed. As usual, Stephen Graubard's suggestions were most useful. Tony Alvarado, superintendent of District Two in New York City, and Ramon Cortines, recently retired superintendent of schools in San Francisco, were generous and thoughtful informants. The teachers whom we observed have been extraordinarily helpful and informative. Cynthia Brown of the Chief State School Officers offered many helpful comments and supplied useful materials. The interviews and observations were carried out in connection with studies sponsored by the Center For Policy Research In Education (CPRE) at Michigan State University's College of Education. The research has been sponsored by grants from The Carnegie Corporation of New York, The Pew Charitable Trusts, and The Consortium For Policy Research at Rutgers (from OERI grant # OERI-G-008690011). The views expressed in this essay are those of the authors, and are not necessarily those of our sponsors. We are obliged to our colleagues in these studies: Peggy Aikin, Carol Barnes, Jennifer Borman, Dan Chazan, Pam Geist, Ruth Heaton, Nancy Knapp, Nancy Jennings, Susan Luks, Steve Mattson, Sue Poppink, Richard Prawat, Jeremy Price, Ralph Putnam, Chris Reimann, Janine Remillard, Angela Shojgreen-Downer, James Spillane, and Karl Wheatley, all of Michigan State University's College of Education, and Janet Weiss of the Institute For Public Policy Studies at the University of Michigan.

107

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*





BEST COPY AVAILABLE

111

Restructuring Teacher Compensation Systems

By Allan R. Odden and Sharon Conley

THE CONCEPT OF PAYING TEACHERS for productivity moved high onto the education policy agenda during the 1980s. Initially states tried versions of merit and incentive pay, schemes that had failed before (Murnane & Cohen, 1986); such approaches failed again in the 1980s. The demise of the Florida merit pay program was the most visible example. Then states enacted career ladder programs designed to promote the best teachers into broader leadership roles within schools and school systems. The Tennessee career ladder program was the most well-known example of this approach. These systems, too, experienced difficulties. Many argued that by the end of the decade these programs, originally proclaimed the second

wave of reform, had barely produced ripples (Firestone, Fuhrman, & Kirst, 1989). Finally, the 1980s saw more general proposals to transform teaching into a full profession, but the compensation structure for this new world was never described clearly (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986). States continue to focus policy attention to teacher pay. As of February 1991, at least twenty-two states had developed or were developing some type of alternative teacher compensation system.

Several factors explain this attention to teachers and teacher compensation. First, teachers were recognized as key to the implementation of the nation's hopes for a dramatically improved education system (Darling-Hammond, 1984). Second, there existed a sincere belief that the "best" teachers ought to be rewarded more; merit pay, career ladders, and professional status were seen as potential routes to this end (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Third, education was one of the major components of the service sector of the national economy, and productivity improvements in all services—including education—were needed to spur economic growth (Johnston, 1987). Fourth, accomplishment of the president's and governors' national education goals—teaching all students how to think, prob-

Allan R. Odden is professor of educational policy and administration at the University of Southern California. Sharon Conley is associate professor of educational administration at the University of Arizona.

Excerpted with permission from Rethinking School Finance, edited by Allan R. Odden. Copyright © 1992 Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers, 350 Sansome Street, San Francisco, Calif., 94104; (415) 433-1767. For use by the American Federation of Teachers, July, 1993. All rights reserved.

109

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

lem solve, and communicate—required more productive use of funds. Thus restructuring teacher compensation to foster teacher collegiality and accomplish national education goals seemed a proposition worth exploring.

This chapter examines the following question: Can teacher compensation be restructured to foster both teacher collegiality and the development of the professional expertise necessary to accomplish the national education goals? If so, how? This chapter does not address all teacher policy issues, such as pre-service education, alternative certification, or length of school year. Neither does it discuss the politics of implementing the proposed ideas.

We draw upon extensive research in the private sector as well as research on school attempts to align compensation systems with organizational goals, that is, to pay for productivity. Private-sector research findings and proposals to pay for productivity in the private sector are derived primarily from Lawler (1990). In *Strategic Pay*, Lawler, one of the country's foremost authorities on compensation structure design as it relates to individual and group motivation and organizational productivity, synthesizes decades of research on the key issues of effective compensation systems that both motivate and reward individuals and help foster attainment of organizational goals.

This chapter is organized as follows. The first section summarizes the country's new education goals and research conclusions on how teacher knowledge and skills, school organization and culture, and education management relate to accomplishing those objectives. We then identify a set of principles that a redesigned teacher-compensation structure would need to meet.

The second section addresses pay for teachers, the largest portion of teacher compensation. The issue discussed is whether teachers should be paid for the *job* of being a teacher or for the *knowledge and skills* needed to be successful in the job. Then, the third section reviews pay for productivity, discussing the feasibility of including a gainsharing and school-based productivity component in teacher compensation structures. The fourth section briefly assesses two issues related to total compensation: fringe benefits and pensions. The final section summarizes the recommendations and discusses implications for state school finance policy.

Redesigning Teacher Compensation

Designing a compensation system is more than simply determining how to pay individuals. It is

an activity that must (1) identify the organization's primary goals, (2) create a structure that supports strategies needed to accomplish the goals, and (3) use a management approach that fits the organizational structure (Lawler, 1990). For education, these considerations raise several issues, including basic education goals, definition of the teaching job, school organization, and school culture and norms.

In terms of education goals, the key issue is the basic orientation of the system: Is the focus on inputs and processes (which has been the focus of the past) or on outcomes, that is, student achievement (which many argue should be the focus of the future)? This is a key issue for future education management as well as teacher compensation policies. In the past (and to a substantial degree in most school systems today), the organizational emphasis has been on fairness, due process, and equity for all. These are laudable emphases. A compensation structure that rewards all individuals equally, as does the education and experience single-salary schedule, fits quite well with this model.

Today, however, there is an emerging consensus that education should focus more on outcomes. Indeed, national education goals have been stated in terms of outcomes, focusing on what students should know and be able to do at various grade levels and upon secondary school graduation (White House, 1990). The emphasis is on producing students who can think, solve problems, and communicate across all content areas and rank first in the world in mathematics and science. Further, the most effective schools have an outcomes focus (Deal & Peterson, 1990; Hawley & Rosenholtz, 1984; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Rosenholtz, 1985a; Wilson & Corcoran, 1987, 1988) as do the most effective school leaders (Manassee, 1985; Murphy, 1989; Sergiovanni, 1990). The current salary schedule, it is argued, is not linked to goals and does not have either a knowledge and skills or a student outcomes orientation.

A redesigned compensation system could help foster an outcome orientation based on student achievement. This statement may seem to advocate evaluating and compensating teachers based on output (student achievement) rather than knowledge and abilities (skills). On the contrary, we advocate evaluating and paying primarily on the basis of knowledge and skill development, since we assume that it is the most highly skilled and knowledgeable teachers who are most capable of maximizing student learning.

In terms of defining the teaching job, there is also a divergence between past definitions and evolving understandings. Traditionally, a teacher

was prepared for a job—pre-service training that ended with a teacher license or certificate—and then given a teaching job with full responsibilities. Individuals were hired into teaching jobs that were quite well defined. Pay was linked to the job; pay increased with experience on the job and additional education and training. There were no promotional opportunities within teaching. Promotion entailed leaving teaching and moving to another type of job, usually in administration but sometimes support positions in curriculum and staff development. Large pay increases were thus linked to job changes.

There is a growing understanding, however, that teachers' knowledge and skills are the key ingredients of teacher effectiveness. There is consensus that effective teaching of higher-level thinking and problem-solving skills is an intellectually demanding task that is better performed by bright individuals with a liberal arts education that includes deep understanding of the subject matter to be taught (Holmes Group, 1986; Lampert & Clark, 1990; Smith & O'Day, 1988). Teachers need to know very well the subject matter they teach, how students learn that subject matter, and how that subject matter is effectively taught to different kinds of students at different ages. There also is a rapidly developing knowledge base of effective teaching, both of basic as well as higher-level thinking skills (Porter & Brophy, 1988; Smith & O'Day, 1988; Walberg, 1990; Wittrock, 1986).

Further, while there is some evidence that more experienced teachers have more knowledge and skills than less experienced teachers (Carter, Cushing, Sabers, Brown & Berliner, 1988; Lampert & Clark, 1990; Richardson, 1991), education and experience are indirect measures of knowledge and skills. In addition, after three to five years of experience, the relationship between knowledge and skills is not well documented (Murnane, 1983). At the same time, the most effective teachers, and teachers who view themselves as professionals, consider continuous development of professional expertise a primary focus (Little 1982; McLaughlin & Yee, 1988; Rosenholtz, 1989).

In addition, an understanding is slowly emerging that while teachers can acquire some of their

Dissension among teachers and friction between teachers and administrators were the chief reasons why districts abandoned merit pay plans.

knowledge and skills in pre-service training, they need to continue this knowledge and skill development once they begin teaching (Hawley, 1985; Rosenholtz, 1985b, 1989). Moreover, the most effective teachers highly value professional development—the continual learning of knowledge and skills that help them be more effective in the classroom; many teachers may value opportunities for professional development as highly as or even more highly than opportunities for increased pay (McLaughlin & Yee, 1988; Rosenholtz, 1985b). Further—and contrary to popular perception—teachers support evaluation systems that focus on knowledge and skill development (McLaughlin & Pfeifer, 1988; Rosenholtz, 1985a; Wise & Darling-Hammond, 1985). The current compensation structure at best only indirectly supports these more effective and professional views of teaching. A new compensation structure could more directly

emphasize and reward the continuous development of professional knowledge and skills.

In terms of organizational structure, schools generally reflect hierarchical bureaucracies with a command and control structure that flows from the superintendent to the principal to the teachers. But the most effective schools are characterized by high levels of teacher involvement in professional decision making, intense collaboration among teachers and between teachers and administrators, and discretion allocated to service providers, that is, the teachers. An education and experience salary structure that links pay and pay increases to particular jobs (for example, teacher, principal) is appropriate for a large, bureaucratically organized system but not for a system that want to foster continual development of professional skills through teacher collegial interaction and involvement in schoolwide management and decision making (Lawler, 1986).

Further, in terms of culture, the norms and values of traditional schools must give way to those of more effective schools if the bold national education student outcome goals are to be accomplished. Traditional values foster norms of teacher isolation and autonomy, as well as organizational stability (Johnson, 1990). But schools that are effective in producing student achievement and increasing the professional skills and knowledge of

111

American Federation of Teachers: A QuEST Reader

teachers are characterized by norms of collegiality, continuous improvement, professional experimentation, and teacher involvement in professional decision making (Goodlad, 1983; Lieberman, 1988, Little, 1982, 1987, 1990; McLaughlin & Yee, 1988; Rosenholtz, 1989; Johnson, 1984, 1990). In other words, strategies that stimulate professional interaction and cooperation among teachers are vastly more effective in helping to expand their professional repertoire, especially in comparison to strategies, such as traditional incentive and merit pay, that have teachers competing against one another (Conley & Bacharach, 1990; Rosenholtz & Smylie, 1984). For example, dissension among teachers and friction between teachers and administrators were the chief reasons why districts historically abandoned merit pay plans (Johnson, 1984, 1990).

Indeed, even economists have concluded that in knowledge-production industries in the private sector (similar to schools in the public sector) nearly all forms of cooperative worker-involvement plans improve organizational productivity (Blinder, 1990). Consequently, a new compensation structure should reinforce development of organizational norms that focus on the continual improvement of teachers' professional skills, student learning, and collegiality.

In summary, if a new teacher compensation structure is to reinforce core beliefs related to school effectiveness, it must

- Be linked to student outcomes.
- Focus on providing teachers with knowledge and skills necessary for student learning.
- Support continual development of professional expertise, that is, the knowledge and skills needed to teach all students to think, solve problems, and communicate.
- Incorporate high-involvement management techniques, including teacher participation in professional decision making.
- Create norms of continual improvement, collegiality, and teacher involvement in schoolwide issues.

While the current compensation structure for teachers, which bases pay on increased education and experience, does not contravene these findings, at best it only indirectly fosters them (Bacharach, Lipsky & Shedd, 1983, 1984). Support for the current type of teacher pay architecture has been justified largely because most strategies to change teacher compensation have included some form of individual merit or incentive pay strategies that foster teacher competition rather than collegiality (Bacharach et al., 1983; Murnane, 1981; Murnane & Cohen, 1986). In other words, most proposed strategies to pay

teachers for productivity have been designed in ways that contravene research findings on how teachers and schools are effective and thus stimulate a defense of the current education and experience teacher salary schedule. The greatest strength of the present system is thus what it does not do; it does not encourage teachers to withhold information from each other to keep problems from coming to the attention of superiors (Bacharach, 1983). However, it also does not, in and of itself, promote greater teacher interaction or information exchange between teachers and administrators.

The more complex question is whether a teacher compensation structure can be designed that reinforces research findings on teacher and school effectiveness, including fostering collegiality and sharing knowledge about teaching effectiveness. If such a structure could be designed, it would enhance collegiality among teachers and between teachers and administrators and reward teachers for developing the skills likely to produce the largest improvements in students' abilities. The remainder of this chapter identifies how a new compensation architecture for paying teachers might accomplish these objectives.

Base Pay for Teachers

This section discusses issues related to base pay, the bulk of compensation teachers or any workers receive. The key issue is whether to pay for the job or to pay for the individual, that is, to pay for knowledge and skills.

Most private-sector organizations as well as school systems pay for the job. Organizations identify jobs that need to be performed, for example, teacher, teacher aide, assistant principal, principal, staff developer, curriculum development specialist, science coordinator, assistant superintendent, and superintendent. A job description that specifies in some detail what the person in that job is supposed to do is written for each job. Companies and school systems then have elaborate job evaluation systems that grade or rank jobs, primarily through an internal comparison of the job tasks, and provide a salary range generally linked to some external market. Pay, therefore, is determined by the job and the predetermined salary range for the job.

Educators and individuals in most corporations are familiar with this approach to compensation. Increases in annual pay are generally linked to experience or seniority; the longer one is in the job, the higher is the salary. In education, salary increments are provided for additional education and training, as well. This type of compensation structure produces comparisons of job tasks across

organizational subunits within a large organization, provides pay equity across those units, and fosters central control. According to Lawler (1990), such an approach to compensation is appropriate for large organizations in stable environments with one business, such as the old AT&T Corporation.

It is less effective for small organizations in rapidly changing environments and knowledge-production organizations, including elementary schools, secondary schools, colleges, and universities. In fact, Lawler (1990) argues that the rapidly changing nature of the economy makes this approach to compensation appropriate for fewer and fewer organizations. Synthesizing the findings from large numbers of studies addressing organizational needs in a rapidly changing economic environment, Lawler lists several disadvantages of this approach to compensation:

- It promotes bureaucratic and hierarchical approaches to management. It reinforces hierarchy, which is the last thing needed in a knowledge-production organization (see also Von Glinow & Mohrman, 1989).

- It implicitly specifies what not to do and so encourages individuals "to do things right" rather than "to do the right things."

- It de-emphasizes paying people for the skills they have and the jobs they can do; the former is problematic for knowledge-production organizations, and the latter is problematic for organizations with rapidly changing technologies.

- It fosters an internal equity focus rather than an external market or outcomes focus.

- It makes organizational change more difficult because change requires altering and regrading all jobs.

- It fails to encourage continual skill development, technological specialization (for example, grade leaders, mathematics/science lead teachers, staff development, and so on in education), and horizontal career changes, all of which are important ingredients of successful and productive knowledge industries.

- It makes promotion (out of the classroom and into administration in education) too important because higher pay comes primarily with promotion. Moreover, since the trend in the private sector is to reduce management layers in organizations, it makes promotion increasingly difficult and available to very few individuals.

These disadvantages are clearly applicable to schools as one particular type of knowledge organization.

Not only have school systems traditionally paid for the job but newer career ladder programs, which became popular in the mid-1980s, also

advocate such an approach. Career ladder programs, ushered in by the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy (1986) and the Holmes Group (1986), introduced the notion of linking teacher compensation to a differentiated profession. Perhaps the best illustration is the Holmes Group's endorsement of the concept of differentiated staffing as a method to provide a "staged career that would make and reward formal distinctions about responsibilities and degrees of autonomy." Differentiated staffing would "improve the quality, engagement, and commitment of the teaching force" (Sedlak, 1987, p. 7).

The report of the Holmes Group (1986) proposed three levels of teachers: instructors, professional teachers, and career professionals. As a teacher advanced in the system, he or she would decrease the amount of classroom teaching performed and assume responsibility for such new functions as curriculum development, preparation of instructional materials, and conducting research. Career ladder experiments in many states were developed essentially along the lines outlined in the Holmes report.

Career ladder programs were often formulated, at least initially, with the specific intention of developing teachers' professional skills and knowledge. Many career ladders, however, actually created a hierarchical ordering of different job tasks, ranking and paying them according to their supposed level of professional responsibility. Thus, the systems became what Lawler (1990) suggested is clearly inappropriate for knowledge organizations: a pay structure based on a comparison of job tasks. Indeed, teachers were urged to assume new tasks in order to increase their income, for example, develop curriculum, join committees, or mentor beginning teachers. The activities themselves, rather than the teacher's skill development, were rewarded.

In education, the idea of paying teachers for assuming new tasks and responsibilities is not new (Freiberg, 1985). In the 1950s, designers of differentiated staffing plans attempted to circumvent teacher movement out of the classroom (and into administration) by assigning tasks to individual teachers that would restructure their relationships to administration (Bacharach et al., 1983). Differentiated staffing was thus a method of integrating teaching and administrative functions within upper-level positions, for example, "evaluation specialist, curriculum developer and diagnostician of learning difficulties" (Cooper, n.d., p. 50). Current career ladders have been developed along these same basic lines.

However, in paying teachers for new sets of tasks, such systems often perpetuated the situa-

113

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

tions they were attempting to correct; the most qualified teachers became marginally tied to the classroom, and the greater portion of their time was consumed with administrative work (Bacharach et al., 1983). Career ladders that pay teachers for tasks may increase teacher attrition in the classroom by downgrading the classroom function, by encouraging teachers who want to achieve full salary to assume tasks unrelated to the basic teaching function, and by requiring that significant percentages of time be spent outside of the classroom. In addition, teachers must submit a great deal of paperwork documenting their tasks, making the system administratively cumbersome for teachers and principals alike (Watson, Poda, & Miller, 1987; Tennessee Education Association, 1988).

Moreover, some career ladders demote teachers to a lower level of the system if they fail to perform the tasks designated at that step (Bacharach, Conley, & Shedd, 1986). Such systems restrict administrators from assigning tasks to certain teachers and teachers from assuming tasks in which they may be interested but which are not designated at their level. As Lawler suggests, the system promotes an inflexible lockstep division of responsibilities.

The research literature on teacher career development provides some additional insights regarding the deficiencies of a system that links pay to the job or to specific tasks, usually those performed outside of the classroom. McLaughlin and Yee (1988) found that one-third of the teachers they interviewed planned to apply for expanded roles at some point in their careers. However, although teachers voiced a desire to assume larger organizational responsibilities, they went on to discuss how those responsibilities were closely grounded in improving their own classroom effectiveness (see also Yee, 1986). A system that moves teachers out of the classroom into quasi-administrative roles or diminishes the status of regular classroom teaching would seem to be inconsistent with these teacher perspectives.

Pay-for-knowledge plans compensate employees for the job-related skills and knowledge they have, rather than just for the activities or tasks that they perform (Tosi & Tosi, 1986). Salary increases are awarded in recognition of a growing repertoire of skills and knowledge rather than for performing a job. Paying the person, that is, paying for what individuals know and can do, helps organizations actively manage the knowledge and skill acquisition process by motivating and then rewarding individuals for learning specific knowledge and skills.

This approach differs significantly from paying

teachers for tasks. To take an analogy, one would expect that a promotion from associate to partner in a law firm (with a subsequent increase in pay) would not happen simply because certain tasks have been done. The promotion and additional pay would instead be in recognition of growing competence in one's legal practice. Further, since partners charge more per hour, client willingness to pay is due, in part, to receiving a higher level of legal service.

A pay-for-knowledge system is also different from a pay-for-the-job system because it takes into account how the professional develops his or her skills over time. For example, Schlechty (1989) compared two career-ladder plans: a pay-for-performance plan in Tennessee and a career development (pay-for-knowledge) plan in Charlotte-Mecklenberg, North Carolina. The Tennessee plan failed to establish a relationship between career levels and teachers' stages of professional development; instead, career levels designated differences in performance (that is, teachers at the top of the system scored higher on a variety of performance measures than teachers at the bottom). The Charlotte-Mecklenberg plan related career levels to professional development, clarified expectations for the growth and development of (pretenured) teachers, and committed school and district resources to support such development.

In a skill-based pay system, individuals are paid for the number, kind, and depth of knowledge and skills they develop and use. To use such a pay system, organizations must:

- Specify the tasks that need to be performed;
- Identify the knowledge and skills needed to perform those tasks;
- Devise a set of measures and assessments to determine whether an individual has learned and can use the skills;
- Price the skill or specify the pay increment that will be provided for each set of knowledge and skills identified;
- Tell all individuals which knowledge and skills the organization would like them to learn and be able to use.

The base compensation structure comprises an entry-level wage and pay increments. Pay increments are provided for demonstrated performance of knowledge and skills that are key to accomplishing organizational tasks and meeting organizational goals. New sets of skills can either be horizontal (skills needed to work up and down a production line in manufacturing or skills needed to teach in the primary, upper elementary, or middle school level in education) or skills that lead to specialties that allow for the development of technological ladders. For example, universities and cor-

porate law departments have had technical ladder programs for decades. Schools could, for example, provide for specialties in mathematics/science and humanities/social studies.

Knowledge- and skill-based pay is a rapidly emerging trend in the private sector. While most private-sector research on knowledge-based pay has been conducted in manufacturing settings (Gupta, Schweizer, & Jenkins, 1987), the approach seems well suited to professional settings because it emphasizes the continual upgrading of professionals' skills and knowledge and has been shown to be effective in knowledge industries (Lawler, 1990). It is used in some degree by 40 percent of large corporations (Lawler, Ledford, & Mohrman, 1989) and used frequently by high-involvement organizations (Lawler, 1986). During the past twenty years, skill-based pay systems have been installed in several high-involvement manufacturing plants (Lawler, 1986), and productivity has usually improved. It has been used in universities for decades. Skill-based pay is strongly recommended for industries involved with rapidly changing technology and for knowledge industries (Lawler, 1990), which include elementary and secondary schools.

There are many advantages to skill-based compensation systems (Lawler, 1990). Such systems are:

- Flexible in using individuals to perform multiple tasks;

- Compatible with organizations whose success depends on the knowledge and skills of its workers (increasingly true for all American corporations, as well as for schools);

- Supportive of an external- or an organizational-outcomes focus, as the skills rewarded can be aligned with the tasks needed to accomplish organizational goals;

- Supportive or career enhancement within a job category, rather than promotion.

Lawler concluded that skill-based pay systems provide several important subsidiary benefits, including:

- Development of a strong tradition for inservice training;

- Creation of a norm of personal growth;

- Encouragement for employees to try new things.

Futrell (1986), then president of the nation's largest teacher union, strongly endorsed the idea of career-development plans that link salary increases to growing teacher expertise, that is, to improving such skills as mastery of subject matter and ability to manage a classroom. Such a system would assess each teacher's growth relative to set standards rather than to the performance of other

teachers. Accordingly, standards would be criterion- rather than norm-referenced (see Freiberg, 1985). Thus, knowledge- and skills-based pay systems would also avoid a quota on organizational rewards (Lawler, 1990).

In short, knowledge-based pay for teachers appears to have several advantages. It is compatible with a national goal of assisting teachers to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to maximize student learning, thinking, and problem solving. Since there seems to be a pattern to the way teachers go about acquiring and building on their knowledge and skills (Burden, 1982), organizational rewards could be linked to these developmental stages. Further, knowledge-based pay could help foster norms of collegiality and continuous improvement, which characterize the most effective schools and the type of work environment that teachers prefer (Conley & Cooper, 1991; Johnson, 1984, 1990).

Key Knowledge and Skills Rewarded. While a knowledge-based pay system should be tailored to a district's own needs, the following four categories might be considered generally by districts planning to implement such a structure. The specific pay increment for each knowledge and skill rewarded should be market sensitive, that is, reflective of the supply and demand for the skill.

Content knowledge. Elementary, middle, and high school teachers teach content. Knowing well the content they teach is a prerequisite for being able to help students think and problem solve in the content domains (Smith & O'Day, 1988).

Knowledge of how students learn. While this is different from being able to use such knowledge to teach students effectively, it nevertheless is a separate and identifiable area of knowledge.

Knowledge of pedagogy. This is knowledge of instructional strategies that are effective with different types of students and, for elementary teachers, different content areas. Again, while this is different from being able to use such knowledge to teach students effectively, it is a separate and identifiable knowledge domain.

Effective use of pedagogical skills, including classroom management. This entails assimilation of the first three sets of knowledge into action. While there has been disagreement in the past about how to assess proficiency in use of these skills, there is a rapidly advancing knowledge that will make this feasible in the near future. To implement such a developmental approach requires linking a teacher's demonstration of classroom skills with knowledge areas, a major change in performance appraisal (Conley & Bacharach, 1990) and teacher evaluation (McLaughlin & Pfeifer, 1988; Wise & Darling-Hammond, 1985). One notion suggested

by Bacharach, Conley, and Shedd (1990) would differentiate each knowledge base into three progressive sets of skills: application, variety/integration, and leadership. Briefly, in terms of pedagogical knowledge, a beginning teacher would first show the ability to apply such knowledge by conducting one type of instructional strategy in the classroom (for example, establishing lesson motivation). The second, more advanced skill for a new teacher would be to demonstrate a variety of ways of applying the instructional strategy and also to integrate the strategy with other classroom objectives. A third, more advanced skill would be to share innovations in instructional strategies with other teachers in the school (leadership).

Indicators of professional skills other than direct classroom observation include the following:

Evidence of board certification. Rewards should accrue for becoming board certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, the National Association of Social Studies Teachers, or any other professional group that seeks to identify outstanding experienced teachers.

Portfolios/dossiers. As the country changes its student assessment strategies to performance-based systems, teachers increasingly will be required to provide examples of student performance on a variety of tasks. This entails yet an additional arena of complex skills.

Schoolwide leadership skills. These are skills needed to participate effectively in schoolwide education improvement activities. Although mentoring new and experienced teachers and providing coaching and staff development assistance to teachers represent important avenues for teachers' skill growth, a number of other mechanisms exist.

New Evaluation Emphases. It seems obvious that a compensation system that attempts to reward teachers for professional skills and expertise should be accompanied by a new type of teacher assessment and evaluation system to help develop and assess those qualities. Indeed, a compensation system is only as good as the assessment system that supports it. Although an extensive treatment of teacher assessment is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is discussed by one of the authors elsewhere (Bacharach et al., 1990). Two considerations concerning the linkage between a compensation system and its supporting assessment system are critical.

First, when rewards are linked to what teachers know and can do, evaluators are often pressured to generate measures of performance that are (1) broad and general and (2) strictly objective in nature. As a result, teacher assessments begin to

116

The Task
Before Us:
A QuEST
Reader



reflect the most superficial aspects of performance. Evaluation criteria are needed that reflect the actual nature of teachers' professional skill and expertise.

In examining the actual nature of teacher expertise, numerous researchers suggest that the most capable teachers conduct complex problem solving and decision making in response to varied, unpredictable, and changing classroom circumstances (Buchman, 1987; Carter, 1991; Feiman-Nemser & Buchman, 1985; Gitlin, 1990; Griffin, 1985; Lampert & Clark, 1990). Teachers, for example, constantly engage students in the subject matter and meet the counseling needs of individual students while in the midst of managing a highly interactive classroom. Evaluations that assess teachers' judgment and problem-solving capacities would emphasize the complex and uncertain nature of classroom situations. They would *not* reflect the most easily implemented or assessed aspects of teaching (Wise & Darling-Hammond, 1985).

Second, in a system that links teacher evaluation to compensation, evaluators may conduct short-term or one-shot assessments in order to ensure that evaluations are as uniform as possible. In this context, the formal procedural evaluation receives a great deal of emphasis (Rosenholtz, 1985a). The time period *between* evaluations receives little emphasis; often few, if any, resources are allocated to help teachers correct identified weaknesses and build upon noted strengths. This system not only devotes sparse attention to the acquisition of expertise but brings a heavily bureaucratic and judgmental character to evaluations. This discourages teacher participation in the evaluation process and genuine cooperation between teachers and evaluators. For example, in one school, a teacher would loan his or her difficult students to another teacher on evaluation day. Thus, teachers presented a facade that the classroom was as bureaucratic and predictable as evaluators expected it to be.

A supportive evaluation system for a knowledge-based pay system would place heavy emphasis on the period *in between* summative evaluations by scheduling formative, diagnostic evaluations. That is, the current weight given to summative versus formative evaluation would actually be reversed, with more attention to formative, expertise-building assistance among peers and between teachers and supervisors.

Further, while most evaluation systems tend to place the onus for upgrading performance solely on the teacher (see Schlechty, 1989), a knowledge-based pay system would assign districts and schools a strong role in assisting teachers' skill

development. A system that rewards the accumulation of professional skills and knowledge over a period of time would be concerned with providing the type of environment in which this development could take place (Hawley, 1985). In such systems, evaluations by school and district officials would not only identify teachers' respective strengths and weaknesses but also pinpoint school and district resources necessary to assist teachers to address weaknesses and capitalize on strengths.

Teachers' Career Development. A knowledge- and skills-based pay system would also align compensation with district expectations for teachers' career development. Burden (1982), for example, suggested that teachers who have taught for several years become more child-centered in their orientation and are able to experiment freely (see also Richardson, 1991). Similarly, Bacharach et al. (1986, 1987) suggested that as teachers progress in their careers they address different developmental goals. First, teachers concentrate on applying basic knowledge about instruction, classroom management, and student counseling in classrooms. Then, they build on this knowledge by acquiring a greater variety of methods for dealing with diverse classroom situations and for integrating different goals. For example, they become more adept at changing plans midstream in classroom instruction based upon their ongoing evaluation of students' needs and abilities. Finally, teachers concentrate on acquiring leadership skills and knowledge as they progress beyond their individual classrooms to making contributions to the school as a whole. Many districts lack specific expectations concerning teachers' career development despite literature suggesting that a definite pattern exists to the way teachers develop their skills over time (Burden, 1982).

A compensation system focused on improving professional skills and expertise should also concentrate on upgrading the professional induction process (and clarifying expectations for the subsequent progression of teachers' skills and knowledge). The career-development literature suggests that professional induction is most successful when teachers participate in an ongoing and substantive dialogue with teachers and supervisors in the school; such a dialogue is particularly helpful to beginning teachers (McLaughlin & Yee, 1988). A peer team of two or three teachers might be assigned to assist each beginning teacher (Conley & Bacharach, 1990). This peer team could provide formative assistance to the beginning teacher; it might also advocate the summative decision to retain a teacher (or to grant a teacher tenure). Such a structure would define district expectations for the skill development of beginning teachers as

well as expand the role of experienced teachers in such development.

Pay for Performance

The major task for performance-based pay is to tie pay to performance. The major failing with most strategies—in the private sector as well as in education—is that this linkage has not been well developed. This section first discusses the problems with incentive and merit pay, individually based pay-for-performance strategies that have been tried unsuccessfully in the private sector and in schools, and then discusses a new approach to pay for performance that is linked to organizational performance. This new approach has been quite successful in the private sector and is increasingly being tried in public education.

Incentive Pay

Incentive pay is a system of compensation in which the individual is paid a predetermined sum for each unit produced. Summarizing from several research studies, Lawler (1990) identified several problems with this compensation structure:

- It encourages individuals to beat the system by establishing low norms for productivity so that most individuals can meet and surpass expectations.

- It divides the organization into workers who can make more by being more productive and workers such as support and secretarial workers who cannot. It thus produces an inter-worker division.

- It is more difficult to use with a highly educated workforce, which increasingly is the case in this country.

- It causes increasing numbers of problems in our employee-rights-oriented society, with differential awards often leading to numerous and costly employee grievances.

Lawler (1990) concludes that incentive pay is appropriate only where the work (1) is repetitive, (2) can be paced by the worker, (3) is stable and simple, and (4) has easily measured results. According to Lawler, most of this type of work already has left the United States for developing countries with lower workforce wage scales and education levels. Incentive pay is not appropriate for knowledge work, high-technology work, high-involvement management approaches, and work that requires teamwork to be effective—characteristics also of the most effective elementary and secondary schools. As such, Lawler concludes that it is not a real option for the bulk of American industries; by implication, he rejects it for schools as well.

Merit Pay

The more popular version of pay for performance in both corporations and the public schools has been merit pay. Merit pay is a compensation system that links the salaries of employees to evaluations of their performance. The idea is to pay the highest performers the most money. To implement a merit pay plan requires an aggressive individual performance appraisal system that identifies each individual's contribution and pays those who contribute more a higher salary. Merit pay has not been implemented well in either the private or public sectors. The Achilles' heel of most merit plans has been their inability to effectively evaluate performance and, thus, to produce a system in which the high performers earn more in total compensation.

Lawler (1990) notes several problems with implementation of private-sector merit pay plans:

- The major flaw is the lack of credible, comprehensive measures of performance. Without such measures, the link between pay and performance cannot be made. The reasons for the lack of such measures in the private sector have been lack of managerial skill in developing and implementing such measures; worker perceptions that management judgments on individual performance are invalid, unfair, and discriminatory; and the fact that many jobs require teamwork to accomplish tasks, which makes it hard to single out individual performance.

- Merit pay is usually only a small part of total compensation.

- Merit pay is usually rolled into an individual's base pay, so people who stay in the organization are paid primarily for past, not current, performance.

- Fixed pay ranges, which are part of job-based pay systems, usually force the best performers to top out on the pay schedule.

- Managers rarely recommend widely different pay increase differentials.

While some of these obstacles could be overcome with better-designed merit pay structures, Lawler (1990) identifies several points that argue against the use of merit pay structures:

- In complex organizations, which are increasingly the norm, it is difficult to identify individual performance.

- New high-involvement management structures, including the most effective schools, require highly interdependent teams, making it not only difficult but also counterproductive to separate out individual performance.

- Performance appraisal is counterproductive for organizations that attempt to improve quality (see also Deming, 1987; Mohrman, 1989).

In short, Lawler concludes that merit pay is not a feasible option for compensation in most private-sector organizations.

Merit pay has also been less than successful in public education. Although many current merit pay proponents present it as a new concept, the idea actually dates to the early 1900s. However, most of the early merit pay plans did not last, and another wave of interest in the 1960s was short-lived (Murnane & Cohen, 1986). Despite this history of failure, merit pay plans emerged in the early 1980s as one of the most popular reforms. Although proposals in many states were not actually implemented, merit pay often became embedded in other compensation systems, particularly career ladders (Schlechty, 1989).

A major problem with merit pay is that it is difficult and costly to administer. In Murnane and Cohen's (1986) field study of districts implementing merit pay prior to 1978, principals reported the administration of the merit pay program to be burdensome and time-consuming. Higher levels of administration exerted pressure on principals to give some teachers low ratings at the same time individual teachers pressured principals to justify those ratings (that is, to justify them relative to previous ratings or to other teachers). In any organization, when salary increases are linked to the performance appraisal system, employees are likely to closely scrutinize evaluation criteria, methods, and results (Porter, Lawler, & Hackman, 1975).

Murnane and Cohen's (1986) observations are consistent with this research. In addition, the Educational Research Service (1979) found that in the 1960s teacher dissension and problems in administration were the primary reasons districts abandoned such plans, just as Lawler (1990) found for most private-sector merit pay plans. More recently, observers (Popkewitz & Lind, 1989; Timar & Kirp, 1987) have criticized merit pay plans for promoting a bureaucratic and legalistic culture in schools when what is needed are more organic and flexible modes of management.

In sum, merit pay programs appear costly and difficult to administer. They create evaluation problems (or exacerbate existing ones) by giving evaluators incentives to provide broad judgments rather than helpful, diagnostic feedback to teachers. They cause dissension not only between teachers and administrators but among teachers themselves. Underlying much of the dissension is the fact that merit pay systems in education force teachers to compete for a fixed allocation of money; teachers are not, as in other occupations, such as sales, able to generate additional resources for the organization to finance their own pay increments.

Pay for Organizational Performance

While Lawler (1990) suggests that pay for individual performance is not feasible for most private-sector companies, he argues that pay for organizational, division, and unit performance are all possible for most corporations. Lawler's reasoning also applies in the main to education. Pay for organizational performance, he suggests, should be provided in the form of annual bonuses and not rolled into base pay. Thus, he argues that bonus payments for organizational performance should be included in compensation structures that seek to reinforce the attainment of organizational goals.

Lawler concludes from research that bonus payments for organizational performance:

- Improve employee motivation;
- Help build a culture in which the individual cares about and is committed to organizational goals;
- Help adjust labor costs to company profits for profit-making organizations.

Three types of pay for organizational performance systems have been tried: gainsharing, profit sharing, and employee ownership. All usually include some form of worker participation. Indeed, all types and forms of worker participation have been connected to improvements in the productivity of the company, organization, or division (Blinder, 1990).

Employee ownership and traditional profit sharing are not possible in public education. However, a customized version of profit sharing would be possible. While the primary organizational goal in the private sector is profits, the primary organizational goal in public education is student achievement. Other goals are also possible, including good student attendance rates, high school graduation rates, postsecondary attendance rates, and parent and community satisfaction. These could be added to the above discussion. Nevertheless, student performance is one of the most important education goals. Indeed, the nation's education goals include having all students master complex thinking in reading, language arts, history, geography, mathematics, and science and having the United States rank first in the world in mathematics and science. The design of a performance system would need to ensure that achievement gains were made across all levels of achievement, the bottom as well as the top. Gains by the lowest-achieving students could be rewarded more than gains by students in the top half; gains for students not proficient in English could be more highly rewarded to ensure that such a system had a student equity aspect to it.

A system could be devised to provide annual bonuses to staffs in schools that produce improve-

ments in student achievement. While there are several design issues associated with school-based incentive programs, the key issue is that this component of teacher compensation is the analogue to profit sharing in the private sector, which has been shown across several types of private-sector organizations to improve productivity. Further, research has shown that teachers can respond positively to economic incentives (Jacobson, 1988b).

Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, recently proposed a school-based incentive program, distinct from incentive pay, as a major force to restructure and improve America's schools. Shanker's proposal called for a voluntary, nationwide, multiyear school competition. Winners would be 10 percent of participating schools. He suggested using \$500 million from the 1990 President Bush merit-school plan. That amount would be invested for five years. If all schools in the nation participated, the bonus would have yielded \$15,000 for each staff in each winning school; if only half the schools in the nation participated, the bonus would have been \$30,000. He claimed that such a school-based incentive program would "make the school staff into a team bent on achieving the goal of increasing student learning" (Shanker, 1990, p. 355).

South Carolina had individual-based teacher and principal bonuses in place for seven years that provided bonuses of between \$2,000 and \$3,000 for teachers and \$2,000 and \$5,000 for principals. The bonus system was criticized for pitting teachers against teachers. In 1991, the legislature consolidated the programs into one school-based program to provide bonuses for all faculty and administrators in schools showing exceptional improvement.

Gainsharing combines a bonus plan with participative management. It typically uses measures of controllable costs or units of output, not profits, and is usually implemented at a subsystem level such as a plant or division. Gainsharing plans usually establish a base period when controllable costs (which include labor costs) and units of production are measured. When performance improves, that is, when unit costs are reduced or when more units are produced, the employees in the unit share in the gain.

Teamwork and knowledge sharing are characteristic of the most effective schools and the most effective teachers.

In education the subunit would be a school, possibly a department in a secondary school, or a house within a restructured middle or high school. In schools, more units of production would mean improvements in student achievement; unlike the private sector, where more units of production produce a larger revenue stream, such improvements in the schools would not produce a larger revenue stream. However, the unit cost reduction could be incorporated into a gainsharing program for public schools. If teachers in a school could design approaches that reduced costs while maintaining or improving student performance, a gainsharing program could then have them share in the costs reduced. If increased student performance also occurred, teachers would benefit from the school

bonus based on student performance improvements.

Gainsharing programs, according to Lawler (1990), are being adopted by many service organizations, types of organizations that include public schools. Further, improving productivity in the service sector, which now accounts for nearly 80 percent of the U.S. economy, is a key aspect of any long-term strategy to improve the productivity of the overall American economy. Thus gainsharing may not only improve output but also help reduce costs.

Gainsharing programs, moreover, are more than pay-for-performance plans. According to Lawler (1990), they also are organizational development plans. By definition, they entail participative management, making them in tune with current trends of employee involvement. Research on gainsharing in the private sector shows that such programs:

- Enhance coordination, teamwork, and knowledge sharing at lower levels in the organization;
- Focus attention on cost savings as well as on improved organizational outcomes;
- Help with more rapid adoption of new technology and new methods and thus help improve efficiency, which produces bonuses in annual pay;
- Strengthen unions because both employee pay and employee working conditions, the primary focuses of union actions, improve.

Such impacts suggest that gainsharing plans have high saliency for use in education. As argued

earlier, teamwork and knowledge sharing are characteristic of the most effective schools and the most effective teachers. Further, schools need to dramatically improve organizational outcomes—student performance—and use resources more effectively. Schools could benefit from more widespread use of microchip-based technologies to improve both cost structures and organizational effectiveness (Perlman, 1989). Finally, teachers are heavily unionized in most states. Any program that improves student performance, reduces costs, increases teacher pay, improves working conditions, and also strengthens unions ought to be considered for implementation.

For private-sector companies, Lawler (1990) concludes that it is wise to have an overall compensation structure that combines a variety of these elements:

- A knowledge- and skills-based pay component that would provide for the bulk of compensation, thus anchoring the compensation structure by providing a stable base pay, the size of which would be determined by employees' initiative to learn the specified knowledge and skills;

- A systemwide profit-sharing or employee stock ownership program, which in education would be a school-based bonus for improving specified outcomes;

- Gainsharing in operating plants or organizational subunits, which in education would be schools or possibly departments in high schools.

In addition, Lawler suggests strongly that such a compensation system would need to be combined with a congruent management system that included fewer layers of organizational structure, worker participation, and high-involvement management. In education, this would include real site-based management, teacher involvement in professional decision making, development of norms of collegiality, and teacher participation in schoolwide education improvement activities.

Lawler argues that such a multifaceted compensation and management structure would focus individuals on organizational goals, improve productivity, foster improved interworker and worker-management interactions, and improve pay for the most productive and skilled individuals and units. By implication, such a teacher compensation structure would encourage teachers and administrators to develop expertise necessary to promote student higher-level thinking and problem-solving skills; foster the continual development of professional and pedagogical knowledge; and stimulate teacher involvement in schoolwide education improvement, including cost reduction strategies and productive uses of new and expensive technology. Finally, such a structure would support cre-

ation of a school culture characterized by norms of collegiality and continual improvement and strengthen union roles in supporting the implementation of these objectives.

Total Compensation

Benefits and pensions are part of the total compensation package, and changes in them can provide further help in fostering recruitment and retention of able individuals and educational improvements.

Lawler (1990) states that employees typically desire a different mix of benefits than is provided in most fixed benefit packages and usually value fixed benefit packages at about 30 percent less than their actual cost to an organization. This produces a lose-lose situation. The solution, says Lawler, is to offer a flexible benefit package from which employees can pick the mix of benefits they prefer, subject to a cost constraint. Such flexible benefit options, now provided in over 30 percent of the Fortune 1000 companies, produce a win-win situation. Individuals are pleased, and organizations do not have to increase benefit costs. In fact, many organizations have realized costs savings as they have switched to flexible benefit packages. Merging, and even expanding, health benefit coverage is less expensive than having two organizations provide a full, but narrower, range of health benefits.

Flexible benefit plans particularly fit the culture of knowledge-work organizations because such organizations are staffed largely by highly educated professionals who like to make decisions for themselves. Since education systems and schools are knowledge-work organizations, flexible benefit plans are likely to have similar positive outcomes. Thus, another change in the overall compensation structure would be to switch to a flexible benefit system. Further, since such plans improve the private sector's ability to recruit and retain productive workers (Lawler, 1990), the impact should be the same in education. Flexible benefit packages in education could help recruit and retain able individuals in teaching, improve teacher satisfaction with fringe benefits, and possibly reduce the cost of fringe benefits.

Pensions also are an important component of total compensation. Current state approaches to teacher pensions are problematic on several grounds (McLoone, 1988). First, pension benefits are inequitably available to teachers both within and across states. Because of district hiring policies, as well as state vesting and portability restrictions, state pension benefits can vary widely for teachers who have taught for the same number of

121

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

years in the same state, but perhaps not in the same district. Second, many state pension plans are drastically underfunded, and teacher pension benefits are in some jeopardy.

Third, there is no portability of pensions across state boundaries. Thus, teachers who move out of state literally have to begin their pension program again in the new state. While sometimes teachers can buy into the new state pension, it usually is expensive. Although teachers often are allowed to draw out their pension contributions from the state from which they moved, interest on their own contribution is usually low or nonexistent, and they rarely have access to the state's contribution. The resultant sum they withdraw is usually much less than the cost of buying into the new state's program. In short, teacher pensions are low, are inequitably provided, and inhibit mobility across state lines.

The solution, according to McLoone (1988), is a "defined-contribution" pension program, similar to that provided to professors by most colleges and universities. In a defined-contribution pension program, organizations make an annual contribution of money to a pension program that is usually national in scope; the funds are usually immediately vested with the individual. When the individual moves across district or state lines, the new employer simply makes its contributions to the same pension program, and the individual teacher is not penalized for moving. The TIAA-CREF pension program, provided to most college professors, is one of the most well known defined-benefit national pension programs. Such programs are now provided by a wide range of institutions, and most colleges and universities give professors a choice of national programs.

As is the case with most state pension programs, most university programs require an employee contribution that is matched at some rate by the university. Professors usually contribute 5 percent of their salary, which is then matched on a two-to-one basis by the college; thus, many professors have 15 percent of their salary contributed to a pension program each year. This percentage compares quite favorably with the rate for most teacher pension programs, which can reach a level of 8 percent contributed by the employee and 8 percent by the education system.

There are two other advantages to this type of pension program for teachers. First, the liability is met annually as part of overall compensation costs; there are no unfunded future liabilities. Second, if the school district is required to pay the employee cost, the fiscal inequity of having states pay the pension costs for all teachers—in high- and low-expenditure—per-pupil, and thus high- and low-

salary districts—is eliminated.

In short, switching to a defined-contribution pension program would add another attractive component to teachers' total compensation. Such a program would foster teacher mobility across district and state lines; eliminate potential unfunded, future state pension costs; and reduce current fiscal inequities in how states and districts pay teacher pensions.

Implications for State School Finance Policy

This chapter has shown how a redesigned education compensation system could undergird a goal-oriented education system; help produce high levels of student achievement in higher-level thinking and problem-solving skills; stimulate teachers' ongoing development of professional knowledge and skills; foster teacher involvement in professional decision making; spur development of norms of collegiality and continual improvement; improve teachers' total compensation; and enhance the ability of education to recruit and retain more able individuals in teaching. As Lawler has noted, designing a compensation structure is more than just a pay issue; it is an activity that affects organizational goals, structure, culture, norms, and management strategy. This chapter has made several suggestions for rethinking how teachers are paid and, in the process, how schools are organized and managed.

The proposed new compensation structure has been derived from research on compensation strategies that work in the private sector, especially for knowledge-production organizations (of which school systems are a prime example in the public sector), and from research on what has and has not worked in education.

The following six changes in school finance structures could stimulate movement toward this revised manner of teacher compensation:

1. States and the federal government could provide development funds for the design of alternative skill-based pay structures, including assessment structures. For the federal government, this would include support for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards; states could support State Boards for Professional Teaching Standards. States also could provide incentive funds for districts that volunteer to begin such programs. States would want to ensure that the knowledge and skills identified would be strongly linked to curriculum frameworks that teachers would be expected to implement (Smith & O'Day, 1991).

2. States could directly fund major new staff

development initiatives to spur development and expansion of teacher knowledge and skills. Indeed, massive professional staff development is needed to upgrade the expertise of teachers to enable them to teach the thinking-oriented curriculum needed for all students to achieve high levels of thinking and problem solving (Smith & O'Day, 1988, 1991). Since staff development funds are usually seen as extras and not part of programs, states could set aside 1 percent of the foundation or base program for staff development. That would provide between \$30 and \$75 per pupil for local staff development, a sum well within the range needed to change school curriculum and instruction to accomplish the nation's bold education goals.

3. States and the federal government also could provide development funds for designing gain-sharing plans. There is a well-developed technology for designing these programs in the private sector (Lawler, 1990), but customized designs would need to be developed in order to use them in schools and school districts.

4. States could fund school-based, pay-for-improvement bonus programs, similar in intent to those already implemented in ten states. The Florida program provides a sum to districts, and each participating district designs the school-based incentive program. By contrast, the South Carolina program is state designed, and school improvement rewards are based on state-set standards. States could make such programs a separate categorical program, as all states have done so far. But the bonus needs to be larger than what has been offered. While the Kentucky bonus of 40 percent might seem high, substantial bonuses are needed in order to be effective motivators (Lawler, 1990). Salary bonuses of at least 15 to 20 percent should be supported. Over time, states could set aside a fixed percentage of the base foundation program for such bonus schemes since such funds provide the bulk of teacher salary dollars. If teacher salaries consume about 45 percent of local district budgets and if 20 percent is allocated for bonus payments, then 9 percent of the foundation level could be set aside by state law for either state- or district-designed-school-based student

performance improvement salary bonuses.

5. States could require all local districts to design and implement flexible benefit programs for teachers. States also could develop computer programs to help reduce the costs of implementing such programs.

6. States could, over time, change the entire teacher pension structure from a defined-benefit, state-funded public pension system to a defined-contribution, private-sector teacher pension program. This would likely enhance the equity of teacher pension benefits as well as reduce costs. Further, for states that now pay pension costs at the state level for teachers in all districts regardless of fiscal inequities and teacher pay differentials, decentralizing pension costs to teachers and local districts would improve the fiscal equity of this part of education costs. Districts could target a 5 percent contribution from employees and a 10 percent contribution from the district as the shared-cost goal over time.

As the private sector has learned over the last two decades, it is possible to dramatically restructure work, organization, management, and compensation in a manner that improves both productivity and worker satisfaction. Such changes were successfully implemented in numerous high-technology and knowledge-production organizations, the latter being the generic description of schools and education.

This chapter has proposed changes in teacher compensation structures and complementary changes in state school finance policies to restructure teacher compensation, school management, and student learning. While the proposed changes allow for state and local tailoring of the specifics, the proposed structure would contribute substantially to the country's ambitious attempts to dramatically improve its education system. It would help retain more knowledgeable and more skilled individuals into teaching. It would foster characteristics of school organizations and cultures associated with the most effective schools and teachers. It would align pay with school productivity, that is, student achievement. It could even strengthen teacher unions. It is a plan worth discussing and trying.

123

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*





BEST COPY AVAILABLE

It Takes Two to Tango

By Patrick Welsh

"A MERICAN KIDS WANT THEIR teachers to do everything for them. They're spoiled. In other countries, teachers just lecture and leave and you have to get it," says Amir Batouli, who attended schools in Tehran and Vienna before coming to T.C. Williams High School in Alexandria, Virginia, where I have been teaching English for the last twenty years. "Most teachers here are better than the ones I had in Iran and Austria. They try all kinds of different methods to make it interesting. It's the American students, not the teachers, who are the problem," says Batouli.

"I hear kids saying, 'All my teachers suck—that's why I'm not getting A's.' They're just making excuses for not working. It's our culture—the American way—not to push yourself if it is not going to have some immediate reward," says Sarah Drucker, who was in my class two years ago.

I thought of these comments by my former students when I saw a chart the other day that comes

out of the work of Harold Stevenson and his multinational team at the University of Michigan. For more than ten years, Stevenson and his colleagues have been studying and comparing the attitudes, educational achievement, teaching methods, and school arrangements of the U.S., Japan, Taiwan, and China. The chart showed the responses of American, Japanese, and Taiwanese students when asked to identify the most important factor in their performance in math.

The contrast in their answers is stunning. Seventy percent of the Japanese students and 60 percent of the Taiwanese students placed the burden squarely on their own shoulders: They named "studying hard" as the determining factor in how well they did. Only a quarter of the American students agreed that hard work on their part was the key. Some named native intelligence, some said the home environment. But a clear majority of U.S. students—55 percent—put the responsibility on their teachers. A "good teacher," they said, was the most important factor in determining how well they did in math.

As my colleague Ed Cannon puts it: "Today the teacher is supposed to be responsible for motivating the kid. If they don't learn, it is supposed to be our problem, not theirs." And of course, today's busy parents, who are guilt ridden over the little time they spend with their kids, are big subscribers to this the-

125

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

Patrick Welsh teaches English at T. C. Williams High School in Alexandria, Virginia. This article originally appeared in the Spring 1992 issue of American Educator, the professional journal of the American Federation of Teachers.

ory. Cannon and I chuckled as he told me of an affluent mother who recently was waiting outside his classroom door before he arrived at 7:00 A.M. She had come to complain about the B+ Cannon gave her son. "English is his forté; you are destroying his self-esteem," she whined.

Recently a parent whose child had done next to nothing in my senior English class came to a conference to tell me that his son did well when inspired by his teachers. The implication was obvious: It was my fault that his son was getting a D.

"Kids have convinced parents that it is the teacher or the system that is against them. In my day, parents didn't listen when kids complained about teachers," says T. C. Williams chemistry teacher Dave Roscher. "We are supposed to miraculously make kids learn even though they are not working. That's impossible with chemistry. They have no idea of what hard work is."

THIS HALF OF THE LEARNING EQUATION—the student half—has been conspicuous for its absence from school reform efforts of the last few years. Don't get me wrong, I'm an enthusiastic supporter of most aspects of the reform movement. Schools, especially high schools, need a major overhaul. There's too much teacher lecturing; there's an overreliance on textbooks—a mind-numbing approach to subject matter; the days are divided lock-step into fifty-minute, unconnected periods; and the schools themselves are often large, anonymous enterprises instead of communities of learning for teachers and students alike.

"Education has been turned into a little formula—the teachers spit out the information; you write it down then spit it back on a test. You can't ask any real questions or go into any depth or do any real thinking because the teacher has to 'cover the material.' You sit in these boring classes for hours, doing tons of busy work. I can just about get through the day," says National Merit finalist Megan Reilly.

Even the best teaching and highest student motivation are at the mercy of the ever-present fifty-minute Carnegie unit in which we teachers live our lives. The best student artists say that art cannot be done in fifty-minute chunks. Just about the time the creative juices get flowing, the teacher tells them it is time to clean up, the bell rings, and they have to rush to the next class. Science teachers say they are not given the time they need to set up the kinds of labs that would turn students on to their subjects. In my English classes, the emotional impact of exciting film productions of plays like *Death of a Salesman* and *Henry V* is dissipated when they have to be shown over a three-day period. It is as if regimentation and order, not excitement and passion for learning, are the bottom line in today's schools.

But even if all the reforms were magically enacted tomorrow, they would mean little if students didn't hold up their end of the bargain. Not that the two aren't intertwined. Of course they are. Good teaching can inspire student effort. But—although I'm not advocating this arrangement—learning *can* take place in the absence of good teaching. It *cannot* take place in the absence of student effort.

I often tend to romanticize the nuns and priests I had as my teachers in the Catholic high school I attended in western New York during the late fifties. But in reality some of those teachers were pretty bad. I had a horrible teacher for Latin III. But I learned more Latin that year than ever, because in that school culture it was very clear that learning was up to the student. I would never have thought of going to the counselor to get out of the course or of having my parents take me out. The whole class knew that at the end of the year we had to take the New York State Regents in Latin and that blaming the results on the teacher wouldn't cut it. I got one of my highest Regents marks in Latin III, and I felt great about it because I learned the subject pretty much on my own.

MAYBE EVERY GENERATION OF STUDENTS has wanted to take it easy. But until the last few decades, they weren't allowed to get away with it. "Nowadays, it's the kids who have the power. When they don't do the work and get lower grades, they scream and yell. Parents side with the kids who pressure teachers to lower standards," says chemistry teacher Joel Kaplan. "I'm constantly hearing, 'But I can't be a doctor if I get a B.' The kids are caught in a conflict. The parents have them obsessed with grades, but they don't want to do the work involved."

But it's not only parents who are siding with students in their attempts to get out of hard work. "Schools play into it," says psychiatrist Lawrence Brain, who deals daily with affluent teenagers throughout the Washington metropolitan area. "I've been amazed to see how easy it is for kids in public schools to manipulate guidance counselors to get them out of classes they don't like. They've been sent the message that they don't have to struggle to achieve if things are not perfect. They jawbone their teachers into capitulation—nag and nag until they get what they want," says Brain.

Whether those nuns or priests I had in high school were good or bad teachers, they got enormous respect from parents, as did most teachers in the fifties. For today's parents, it is open season on teachers. At the beginning of this school year, I asked an Alexandria mother how her thirteen-year-old liked the junior high school she just began attending. Without a moment's hesitation, the mother launched into a diatribe on two teachers that her

daughter "didn't like." I wanted to tell the woman that maybe she should be more concerned if her daughter did like those teachers at the beginning of the year; that maybe those teachers were pushing her daughter to do her very best work—a push that most thirteen-year-olds naturally resent and take as a personal attack.

Respect for teachers has eroded in private as well as in public schools. A teacher at St. Alban's in Washington, D. C., one of the most prestigious private schools in the country, told me that a major concern of faculty there is the attitude of parents. "Many parents seem to equate intellect with money. The implication is that if you could be doing something else you wouldn't be teaching," she said. A teacher in a private school in Philadelphia told me his colleagues are often blamed for the problems of affluent students whose parents refuse to recognize their offspring's limitations. "These parents have had their kids at boarding schools for years and then send them off to summer camp. If you give their kids a C, it has to be your fault because their child has to be Yale or Stanford material. It's the first time they haven't been able to get their kids something with a checkbook. So they take their frustration out on the teacher." Obviously when parents blame teachers for kids' grades, the message is that it's the effort of the teachers, not that of the kids, that is the key ingredient to learning.

"Thirty years ago the school was always supported over the individual. But today the sense of individual entitlement is so great and the school community is splintered. There is more chaos and infighting. School systems are very responsive to parents' complaints. The kids apply pressure to parents, who then complain to principals who won't back teachers," says Fairfax family therapist Joseph Jurkowski.

There is ample evidence that across the country kids and parents are having their way when it comes to beating teachers down for grades. As reported recently by Carol Innerst in the *Washington Times*, 23.5 percent of freshmen entering college last fall reported having an A average in high school—almost double the percentage with A averages in 1969. Innerst reports that Eric Dey, associate professor of the freshman survey project at the University of California at Los Angeles, thinks that high school teachers are having to deal with "massive levels of underpreparation. So that if a student gives half an effort and doesn't cause any problems, that's where we are getting grade inflation." High school teachers who hold to high standards would agree. "If they come to class and don't give you any trouble, hand in a little homework, they think they deserve a C even if they fail every test. In junior high school, they must have been rewarded for not harassing teachers," says my colleague Dave Roscher.

But teachers are also responsible for the fact that kids are doing less work. Like parents, we have caved into kids. Paul Levitt, professor of English at the University of Colorado, tells the story of a colleague who complained at the end of a term that "students can't write worth a damn." Levitt later found out that his colleague gave the kids he was complaining about a combined GPA of 3.1 on a four-point scale. "Such grades would suggest that either his students can, in fact, write—and can write damn well—or that my colleague regards a 3.1 average as inadequate, in which case he has lent himself to the growing band of high school teachers and university professors who feel that any grade less than a B is failing. All across the country there are instructors . . . who contend that a paper is 'abysmal,' then give it a B on the theory that 'that's punishment enough.' We have entirely too many students walking around packing a three-point-plus grade average [GPA] even though they can neither think logically nor write gracefully," says Levitt.

ONE OF THE REASONS THAT MANY STUDENTS don't work hard is that schools have told them in subtle and not-so-subtle ways that their ability, as measured by the standardized tests of school "experts," is much more important than time and effort put in on study. Take the labeling of some kids as "gifted and talented"—usually in the third grade but in some cases as early as kindergarten. What school officials seem incapable of understanding is that when they label one group of kids "gifted and talented," they are automatically labeling all the others "ungifted and untalented"—and those kids know it. As *Washington Post* columnist Allan Barth once wrote: "There is hardly any kid who isn't bright enough to understand that he isn't considered very bright."

T. C. Williams graduate Karen Carrington has bitter memories of the days in fourth grade when her "gifted" peers would be pulled out of class. "They got to do the interesting things that would stimulate any kid to learn. They had the plays, the fun projects; they cooked Chinese food. The rest of us would sit in the classroom and do fifty of the same problems over and over again. That would make anyone feel inferior. But when you're black and look around the room and see that almost all the 'gifted' kids who are pulled out are white, it makes you feel even worse," says Carrington, who overcame those feelings to become a top student, accepted at Columbia and Northwestern.

A white guidance counselor in a Fairfax high school said that her son's friends would ask him why he wasn't in the gifted program when he got such good grades. "I explained to him a hundred different ways that it didn't make any difference. But in

127

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

his mind it still came out that he wasn't as good as his friends who were in the program. That message comes from the system; it is so visible a message when kids are separated," says this woman who does not want to be identified.

"When I first came to America, I was astounded to hear all these parents telling me how 'gifted' their children were. People in other countries just don't do that," says Anthea Maton, a British physics teacher with the National Science Teachers Association.

In their just-released book *The Learning Gap: Why Our Schools Are Failing and What We Can Learn from Japanese and Chinese Education* (Summit Books), Harold Stevenson and James Stigler argue from extensive research that while the Chinese and Japanese see hard work as the key to accomplishment, Americans—educators, parents, and students—emphasize innate ability over effort. As Stevenson and Stigler put it:

An overemphasis on innate abilities has insidious implications for children's development and education. Children who believe that their high ability is sufficient to insure success find little reason to work hard. Alternatively, children who perceive themselves as having low ability and doubt that they can master their lessons through continued effort also have little reason to work hard. Many American students apparently hold the latter belief. In contrast, Asian students, confident that the time they invest will lead to mastery of the academic curriculum, work long hours at their studies. Chinese and Japanese societies allow no excuses for lack of progress in school. Regardless of one's current level of performance, opportunities for advancement are always believed to be available through more effort. High scores on a test are interpreted as a sign of diligence. Low scores are not regarded as a sign of stupidity, but simply as an indication that the student has not yet learned what will ultimately be possible through persistence and hard work.

I didn't have to read the research of Stevenson and Stigler to know the truth of what they are saying. Every year, many of the National Merit Scholars—those with the highest scores on standardized tests—in my senior advanced-placement classes put down classmates who outperform them on the work for the course. One of these "scholars" who got a D on a test said of a girl who got an A: "So what? She's not a good student." The fact is the girl is a terrific student and has gotten A's on everything all year. The implication of what this guy was saying was obvious: "My score on standardized tests—my 'ability'—is

**Americans—
educators,
parents, and
students—
emphasize
innate ability
over effort.**

much more important than the results she achieved through hard work."

This kind of arrogance is typical of kids who "test" better than peers. As Jim Dawes, a former student of mine now at Oxford, put it: "Many kids who have been in the gifted and talented and honors programs have bloated egos because fawning teachers and parents have always told them how great they were. By the time they get to high school they think they know more than their parents and teachers." But behind the arrogance is an unwillingness to work. When I gave several of the National Merit types the first B's they ever got in English, they were outraged. One young man who tried to argue me down finally admitted that he just didn't want to work as hard on his papers as some of "those nerdy girls" who got A's.

Stevenson and Stigler discuss another effect of putting the focus on ability rather than effort: "An emphasis on innate ability makes Americans preoccupied with categorizing children as a basis for deciding who can benefit from particular kinds of education. Expectations for 'low ability' children are reduced, and they finish their education with inadequate skills and insufficient knowledge for finding jobs and adapting successfully to contemporary society."

The emphasis on innate ability over hard work takes its toll especially in math, say Stevenson and Stigler, who point out that "American children view learning mathematics as a process of rapid insight rather than a lengthy struggle. According to one researcher in mathematics education, American children appear to believe that if a mathematics problem is solvable, it can be solved in fewer than ten minutes. The unfortunate result is that American students are likely to give up before they reach genuine understanding."

Even the presumably most dedicated students look for fast, painless results. Hollis Williams, who taught physics at Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, in Annandale, Virginia, the school with the highest number of National Merit Scholars in the country, says, "You have to put in the time in science. Kids want the answers quickly—as if a science problem were a sitcom or MTV. A group of my students was working on a problem for forty-five minutes and had gotten several insights. But they thought it was a waste of time because they hadn't gotten the answer yet."

WHAT ABOUT KIDS WHOSE FAMILIES ARE in the tight grip of all the problems poverty brings: Should we expect less from them? It is a difficult line for teachers to walk. On the one hand, we scrupulously guard against lowering our expectations, of being part of a self-filling prophecy. On the other hand, we want to acknowledge the painfully difficult circumstances of these children and the impact those circumstances have on learning.

Last year, for example, in one of my "low-track" classes, kids filtered in from all over the country. A fifteen-year-old, who became one of my favorites, traveled alone by train from Chicago with her infant baby to live with a relative. When I recently checked on her whereabouts, no one knew if she was still in the area going to school. And it's not just low-income kids who have chaotic family lives, though it is disproportionately so. Other students in my class were being tossed between divorced parents living hundreds of miles apart or bounced around the Beltway to aunts and grandmothers in Prince George's and Fairfax counties.

The answer to how much we should expect from kids who carry problems like these on their shoulders is, of course, that we should expect a lot, but we need to give them extra help and to show them that there is a future that can be theirs. I've seen first-hand that kids most schools give up on can be reached—not just disciplined but turned on to learning.

My own school has created an experimental class that is proving that many "at-risk" kids really want to—and can—learn. The course is taught by Candis Ramelli and Chris Gutierrez, two dynamic English teachers with extensive experience in adjusting teaching to the various learning styles of students.

Most of the youngsters enrolled in the course are minority students, and nearly all those enrolled scored below the 35th percentile in reading. But these students tell me they have never worked harder, learned more, or enjoyed class as much. "It's such a relief to come to this class," says Alpheila Kerns. "Mrs. Gutierrez and Mrs. Ramelli make us do more work, but they show us how to understand it. The other teachers are just putting the grades in the book. In ninth grade, I was in a low-phase class. I felt so stupid I didn't even try. Now I'm doing SAT prep, I'm reading Greek plays, I'm thinking college, I don't feel I'm low anymore."

The success of this class is a sterling example of both halves of the learning equation coming together: good teaching *and* rigorous work standards.

Adults are sometimes surprised to hear kids say they welcome discipline and challenge. But not 1st Sgt. La Grant Smith, one of the two instructors of the Junior ROTC at my school. The program started with sixty-two students in September. Since then,

kids have been coming out of the woodwork to join. "We now have 140 kids in the program. We had to add an afterschool class to accommodate them all," says Smith.

When Smith ran an ROTC program in the District of Columbia Street Academy, administrators were afraid to discipline the harder cases for fear they would drop out. "Just the opposite happened," says Smith. "When we made them stay after school for breaking rules, they gladly accepted."

"In regular school, when you cause trouble you get pulled aside by an administrator and maybe get sent to detention after school. It's no big deal," says junior Wesley Johnson. "If you cause trouble in ROTC, it's serious business. You get called up in front of all the cadets. It's humiliating. Then they take your rank away—something you have worked months for—and give it to someone else right in front of you. You think twice before you risk that happening."

WE SHOULD LISTEN CAREFULLY TO THAT high school junior. He is taking us back to something basic to human nature, something that may lie at the heart of the student effort problem. It is the simple notion of consequences, the idea that much of human behavior is directed by the consequences—good or bad—that result from that behavior.

Poor grades have traditionally been the strongest in-school consequence of poor academic performance. I've already described the near-meltdown that has occurred in that arena. But there's another, even bigger, piece of the motivation puzzle: It's the lack of external consequences. Reformers who do not see the importance of making a clear connection between student effort and serious, real-life consequences may be doomed before the starting bell even rings.

When high school kids look at the world beyond the school walls, what do they see? Those who have gotten the idea that they can go on to further education see colleges accepting almost anyone who is medically alive and has parents who are willing to write a check. When students of mine seem to be having nervous breakdowns over SATs and college acceptances, I often try to settle them down by reminding them of the fact that they constitute the lowest number of seventeen- to eighteen-year-olds of any generation in the country since 1940. All but a few colleges, I tell them, are desperate to keep up enrollments and will most likely accept them and their parents' money with open palms. If the worst happens and they don't get in anywhere, they can go to a junior college for a year or two and then transfer. What I can't bring myself to tell them is the bottom line: That high school in this country is a fault-



free environment where, if you choose, you may completely mess up and still go on to further education.

"Adolescents are like adults," writes Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers. "They do as much as they have to in order to get what they want. The young people who want to go to elite schools must meet high standards, and they work hard. But the rest of high school students know they can get into some college no matter how poorly they do."

Even the students who worry about doing well on SAT tests have little motivation to study hard in school. As Shanker points out, the big difference between our college entrance exams and those of other countries is that ours "pride themselves on being divorced from the curriculum." By testing "aptitude" rather than achievement, Shanker explains, our tests "do not call on students to demonstrate what they have learned in school. . . . Other nations' exams turn this around; they are based on the curriculum the students have studied, and they try to find out how much students have learned and how well they can use it. . . . There's no chance of getting by with a combination of vague general knowledge and inspired guesswork."

In the last ten years, I have been amazed to see the kinds of kids colleges are accepting. Affluent white kids who have been kicked out of several private schools before landing in my class, who barely had a C average, and who have been addicted to alcohol and other drugs have been getting into what I once thought were respectable schools. Minority kids who are barely literate have been waltzing into higher education. Even many of the brightest kids who get into the super-selective schools are doing as little as possible as they build the resumes that the Ivies and other competitive schools are looking for. And the point is, the kids know it. They see their do-nothing older buddies getting in, and they realize they don't have to work.

Columnist Robert Samuelson put the problem in perspective in a *Washington Post* essay last year: "College leaders see themselves as the victims of poor high schools. This rationalization is at least half

High school
in this
country is a
fault-free
environment
where you
may com-
pletely mess
up and still
go on to
further
education.

backward. Lax high school and college academic standards feed on each other. In our society, the badge of successfully completing high school is not just the degree but the ability to go to college—and almost anyone can go to college."

Samuelson suggests taking some of the fault-free quality out of education. He suggests that states could "shut down 10 percent to 20 percent of their colleges and universities, so schools wouldn't have to continually scrounge for students. States could also sharply raise their tuition and couple the increases with big boosts in scholarships. But to keep scholarships, students would have to maintain a C average."

Likewise, Shanker favors paying the full costs for students who meet rigorous standards but could not otherwise afford college. And, he adds, "it's not a now-or-never proposition. America has always been the land of second and third chances. There

should be multiple opportunities to meet the standards and lots of help to do so. But no one should be admitted to college without being able to do college-level work."

Samuelson is right on the mark when he says that establishing *real* college admission standards "would instantly improve high schools." Students do respond to challenge when they see it is in their best interests to do so. But instead of offering challenges and clearly defined goals that kids can work toward, we let them slide by for fear that not all of them will choose to—or be able—attain those goals. As Samuelson puts it, "We prefer to maintain poor schools—high schools and colleges—that everyone can attend rather than have good schools that might benefit most students. We prefer to complain about 'underinvestment' in education rather than face the harder question of why our massive investment in education produces such poor results. . . . No matter how worthy, reforms can't succeed unless students work harder."

Samuelson and Shanker are right. Several decades ago, if a child didn't learn, we blamed the child. That was wrong. Now if he doesn't learn, we blame the adults or the system. That, too, is wrong. It's time we insisted on both halves of the learning equation.

131

American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader





BEST COPY AVAILABLE

A Prescription for World-Class Schools

By John A. Murphy

ON DECEMBER 18, 1991, A GROUP of the nation's leading education experts gathered in Charlotte at my invitation to begin to sketch in the elements of a "world-class" school system. They have met twice since then. The panel has agreed to recommendations that promise lasting reform—some for Charlotte to act on now, and others to be implemented over the rest of the decade.

Reflected in the following summary of the panel's work are the voices of thousands of Charlotte high school students, teachers, principals, central office staff, parents and businesspeople.

Some of the panel's recommendations are new—even radical. Many others are old advice that now at last must be heeded. Theirs is not the final word, however. That belongs to the Charlotte community.

John A. Murphy is the superintendent of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system. This article originally appeared in The Charlotte Observer on May 17, 1992, and is reprinted by permission of the author.

Fourteen Recommendations for Success

THERE ARE THREE THINGS TO DECIDE about each of the following proposed strategies. One, is it worth implementing? Two, if so, when? And three, is it an idea that should be imposed universally or piloted first?

RECOMMENDATION #1:

Standards and expectations

The panel recommends that Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools adopt high, rigorous and measurable standards for academic performance that reflect global demands and require all students to meet them. We live in a world of determined, well-educated competitors. Our students must match the competition that resides in Bonn, Stockholm, Paris, Seoul and Osaka, or our destiny is no longer assured.

133

American Federation of Teachers: A QuEST Reader

Implementing strategies:

■ Set standards that reflect the best thinking in the field about the knowledge and skills that students should master in core subject areas. National reform efforts in science, math, geography, English and history, as well as the expectations contained within the International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement programs, should form the foundation.

■ Aim high. It's a mistake to organize thresholds around the lowest common denominator—usually defined as what every sixth-grader should know. Graduates have been telling us for decades that there is no challenge to the enterprise called schooling. Minimum requirements fast turn into maximums.

RECOMMENDATION #2:

The diploma

The panel recommends that CMS make its diploma meaningful. Currently, most high school diplomas mean only that a student has accumulated seat time in an approved location—more a clue to patience than evidence of authentic academic achievement. Employers don't trust it, and students know it has little bearing on their future plans.

Implementing strategies:

■ Abandon Carnegie units (hours of course credits on transcripts). Develop profiles of competency in their place that will describe a student's right to a diploma in units of accomplishment rather than in units of time.

■ Require seniors to write a serious exit essay, present it orally and defend it under cross-examination by other students. It's one measure that can't be faked. An essay reveals a student's grasp of vocabulary, and an ability to express ideas clearly and cogently.

■ Consider developing more than one diploma, including an honors diploma for students of special accomplishment. All diplomas would require students to master, at a minimum, a course of study ordinarily thought of as college preparatory.

RECOMMENDATION #3:

Curriculum

The panel recommends that CMS overhaul its curriculum to provide a nourishing menu of courses consistent with the new standards. The proliferation of options means a graduate can escape the system having digested a handful of diluted courses in math, the sciences, history and the languages. Only about 30% of CMS students

take algebra, and only 38% complete a foreign language. Our students aren't learning things today because they are not studying them.

Implementing strategies:

■ Feature an explicit concentration on reading, writing and computational skills in the early years, as language and symbol development are the centerpiece of knowledge and learning. Students should be reading, writing or computing something every day, or it will be considered a wasted year.

■ Adopt the James Madison High School curriculum as a common core of worthwhile knowledge, important skills and sound ideals for all students.

■ Spotlight global studies: world history, geography and foreign language. The frequency and depth of global interaction has accelerated. To become fully functioning citizens, all children—not just the college bound—must learn of the cultures, politics and languages of the broader world.

RECOMMENDATION #4:

Curricular tracking

The panel recommends eliminating the current curricular-tracking system, which gives the "good" students one curriculum and the "poor" students a watered-down version. Those unfortunate enough to be dumped into the general or vocational tracks—systems characterized by unchallenging courses and the accumulation of low-level skills—find themselves unprepared for either post-secondary education or meaningful work. It perpetrates a cruel hoax on students.

Implementing strategies:

■ Adopt performance groupings in which students at relatively similar levels of accomplishment in a particular subject area study together but all students at all levels study the same rich content. They just do so at different paces.

■ Enable students to move in and out of performance groupings with ease as they master material. One great failing of our current system is that once students are assigned to a particular "group," there's no escape. All children have fast subjects and slow subjects, and days when information comes more quickly than others.

■ Give everyone a dose of the best. Gatekeeper courses such as algebra and geometry must be available to all students. If students—for whatever reason—cannot learn algebra in one year, they should be given two years, three years, or whatever time and help is necessary.

■ Develop schools of choice that would pro-

vide variations in learning sites, learning styles and curricular emphasis to accommodate students' varying enthusiasms, talents and modes of learning.

- Delay vocational instruction until students demonstrate firm grounding in the college preparatory basics. Then shift vocational education to real-world settings in the form of apprenticeships with area employers who use state-of-the-art equipment in their businesses—experiences that a typical high school could not afford to offer given the wide range of vocation options available to students today.

- Link the last two years of high school vocational education directly with the first two years of community college to provide opportunities for more advanced job training.

RECOMMENDATION #5:

Values, work and citizenship

The panel recommends that schools get back to teaching democratic values, work and citizenship competencies. Values tell us what is important and unimportant; the difference between right and wrong. Devotion to the virtues of liberty, equality, justice, compassion, charity and duty are integral to our concept of citizenship, just as punctuality, honesty, trustworthiness and civility are to the values of the workplace. A diverse, pluralistic nation needs a population grounded in a solid core of knowledge and skills. It also needs a people united by a shared set of ethical and democratic values.

Implementing strategies:

- Require community service as a condition of graduation. Students would learn—hands-on—the habits and ideals of service, the very foundation of civic virtue. The greater-Charlotte community should take charge of this effort in cooperation with the schools.

- Require school service as a condition of graduation. Students should assume additional responsibility for routine clerical tasks, cleaning their schools and serving their own lunches.

- Require strong discipline standards. Students who disrupt the learning of others should be assigned to alternative settings.

RECOMMENDATION #6:

Time

The panel recommends letting students proceed at their own pace, giving them as much or as little time as they need to acquire the required skills and knowledge—understanding that everyone will be held to the same high standard in order to gradu-

ate. It is time to erase the unrealistic, misguided assumption that all youngsters can learn the same amount during a six-hour, 180-day school year. Keep in mind that as long as young people in other nations commit a far greater share of their lives to schooling, it is doubtful our students' academic accomplishments will equal theirs.

Implementing strategies:

- Break the arbitrary age-grade link. There is no body of knowledge that experts can point to as age or grade specific. Grade levels are simply an administrative convenience. That means doing away with the traditional twelve grades of school.

- Instead, arrange the skills and knowledge that young people need to acquire into broad levels of learning—foundations of knowledge, basic, intermediate, proficient and advanced—and give each person as much time as necessary to pass through one level into the next. The cumulative skills and knowledge reflected across the first four levels would represent the level of learning required of all graduates.

- Build a system that flexes to accommodate the fact that a student—in relation to his or her individual strengths—is likely to advance quickly through the levels of some subjects and more slowly through others. Passing through to another level would not be a matter of putting in an arbitrary amount of time. It would require demonstrating, on exams and other measures, the skills and knowledge that are needed before starting the next level.

- Borrow a page from the college model to allow for more in-depth study, lab work and seminars by organizing classes on a rotating block schedule. Under the current structure of 50-minute periods, students and teachers often just get rolling when the bell rings and it's time to quit.

- Keep schools open for business for at least 220 days a year. With new, ambitious exit standards, virtually every student will need to spend substantially more time learning each year—but the extra time should be viewed as a flexible resource that should vary by child.

- Insist on proficiency promotion, not automatic promotion. Graduation should be withheld until students demonstrate competency in challenging subject matter. That means, too, closing the loophole in compulsory attendance laws that allows a young person to drop out upon reaching a certain age, whether he or she has learned anything or not.

135

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

RECOMMENDATION #7:

Testing

The panel recommends teaching to the tests—to new assessment measures—that assess curricula in rich form and pose serious intellectual challenges for students. So long as we look to test results for information on student learning, tests should be worth teaching to.

Implementing strategies:

- Move away from the sole use of multiple-choice formats that lack the capacity to accurately measure students' abilities to analyze, reason, create and persuade.

- Require students to write an essay in every subject area at every level of proficiency.

- Embrace authentic testing in which students conduct exercises that simulate their "real-world" cohorts, such as a lab experiment in science or a drawing in art. The panel also recommends a variation on this method, i.e. portfolio assessments. Portfolios allow students to assemble a collection of their work in a particular field over a period of months without the normal confines of timed exam settings.

- Replace minimum competency exams that aim low with tests with loftier expectations and higher stakes. Aim high, achieve a lot. Aim low, achieve a little.

- Except for those tests that are imbedded in the curriculum, stop testing students to exhaustion. Develop one or two instruments to give us all the information needed. Tests are used to pinpoint students' instructional needs and progress, and eligibility for college. They are also used to check on the performance of classrooms, schools, school systems, states and the nation. That can mean inflicting a half-dozen or more assessments on the same students. We risk their devoting more time to testing than to learning.

RECOMMENDATION #8

Technology

The panel recommends that the school system take full advantage of technology's potential. Technology revolutionizes schooling because it makes learning portable. It means that learning and all things connected to schooling need not occur in a classroom, six feet from the teacher's desk.

Implementing strategies:

- Create a strategic technology plan for what CMS wants to accomplish. Too often, school systems stockpile newfangled hardware without a

clue about how to use it. Technology gives us the tools, but people's ideas and skills are what will make it work for the system. The focus needs to be on how to use technology to improve the delivery of instruction.

- Refine computer assessments of students. Computers are able to assess quickly the proper domain of the student, so a child does not waste time on questions that are too easy or too hard. The computer is a powerful tool for teachers to stay in close touch with individual rates of learning.

- Use state-of-the-art technology to reduce the barriers between school and home. New technology is a great way for parents to get information about what happens in school on any given day.

- Beam school lessons into homes for children and parents to watch together.

- Develop an interactive distance learning scheme to give students access to advanced studies and to allow teachers and administrators to view expert teaching, and to discuss problems and solutions with thoughtful practitioners and researchers.

RECOMMENDATION #9:

Ready to learn

The panel recommends getting to children early—at birth—to help prepare them for the future. To improve schools, a solid foundation must be laid. If children do not have a good beginning, it is difficult to compensate fully for society's failure later on in their lives. Recent estimates are that nearly 35 percent of the nation's children come to school not fully ready to participate successfully in kindergarten.

Implementing strategies:

- Contact new parents. Let parents know what will be expected to prepare their children for school. School system personnel would help parents gain access to needed services.

- Define and communicate a "readiness-for-school" standard to parents and to prekindergarten and day-care organizations.

- Inventory the needs of the children in the Charlotte community and the resources that exist. This will enable the school system to play an effective brokerage role, matching child to proper service, and to identify the holes in the service structure.

- Vest responsibility for children's programming with the new Children's Services Network. Cross-section agency planning will do much to break down bureaucratic barriers and plug the holes in services.



RECOMMENDATION #10:

At-risk students

The panel recommends that specific strategies be implemented to target young people whose life circumstances put them at risk of letting go or losing out. Although some may be able to escape on their own, a larger percentage will need special attention if they are to have a decent chance at joining the mainstream. These young people are in danger of a lot more than failing at school. With their very lives at stake, theirs is not a condition that schools alone can solve.

Implementing strategies

■ Guarantee personal mentors for children who want or need them. Mentors would work with them, listen to their problems and give them the extra encouragement they need to spur them on to graduation.

■ Establish a home base for students in schools. Assign students to a homeroom teacher for several years at a time. That way no child will be invisible. Every student will be known and nurtured.

■ Ask community, social and health agencies to drop their bureaucratic boundaries, stop focusing on their narrow jurisdictions and set up shop in schools. Schools should stay open for business twelve hours a day, seven days a week, twelve months a year (if necessary) to offer a wide range of public services—from day care and literacy development to health services, parent counseling and job placement—to meet families' needs.

■ Abandon pull-out programs for children who need special services. They tend to disrupt both student and classroom. Instead, find ways to integrate personnel and programming into the classroom setting.

■ Insist on safe and orderly schools by developing firm, fair codes of student conduct and by creating alternative programs to meet the needs of continually disruptive students. Research shows that children who are poor and face hardships in their daily lives often excel in highly structured settings. School is the safest haven for many children. We need to protect that space.

RECOMMENDATION #11:

Teaching

The panel recommends a series of strategies to make teaching a more rewarding and respected profession, to improve the preparation and performance of teachers and to secure expert personnel for the schools. Today, not enough academically able students are being attracted to teaching,

137

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

"good" teachers and "not-so-good" teachers are treated exactly alike, the professional working lives of teachers can be best characterized as "blue-collar," and in-service programs are one big yawn.

Implementing strategies:

■ Require teachers to meet high and rigorous educational standards, to demonstrate an aptitude for teaching all kinds of children, to show competence in an academic discipline, and to display proficiency in monitoring student performance and involving parents in the process of teaching.

■ Make salaries performance based and market sensitive. That means higher pay for good teachers and those who assume extra duties. It also means higher pay for those certified to teach in shortage areas (e.g., science and mathematics) than for those in overstocked fields (kindergarten). Teachers who perform "above and beyond" deserve a payoff in status, role and/or compensation.

■ Tie salary, promotion, retention to an effective, fair evaluation system that includes peer review so superior teachers can be rewarded and poor ones improved or terminated.

■ Excluding 1 percent of the administrative force, make every employee teach some. Too many people get paid too much money to do something other than educate children.

■ Pay the most proficient teachers salaries equal to those of the most proficient school administrators. We need to keep the best teachers where they belong—in the classroom. Right now the incentive is for the talent to move into administration.

■ Provide teachers with opportunities for intellectual growth. At a minimum, teachers need opportunities to spend time in other classrooms to observe, learn and critique without keeping score. In exit interviews, teachers cite professional isolation as a prime reason for leaving the teaching ranks.

■ Extend the school year for adults in the system first. Use that time for staff to acquire the necessary new skills and knowledge. Otherwise we risk offering more of the same, which isn't good enough.

■ Give teachers time to work with other teachers, time to plan and polish each lesson carefully,

Ten guiding principles

138

*The Task
Before Us:
A QuEST
Reader*

TO CREATE A "WORLD-CLASS" ORGANIZATION—one that is client-centered with a passion for results—there are ten guiding principles. Together, they erect a sturdy framework for change.

1. Set high standards of intellectual attainment, which we require all schools to produce and all young people to reach. For too long, too little has been expected of both.

2. Organize the system around those cognitive outcomes. It's time to reorient schools so they focus on results, not on rules and procedures.

3. The school system must respond to differences in children and their social, cultural and economic realities in ways that enable all students to learn the identified core of knowledge.

4. Certain consequences—pleasant or not—must follow success or failure to meet the stated outcomes. Schooling is an enterprise that treats all its staff exactly alike, no matter how they perform.

5. While goals should be set centrally, the

means to reach them must be the domain of professionals at the building level. Edicts from on high must stop.

6. Effective, prompt and accurate ways to measure progress toward meeting the stated goals must be developed at the district level.

7. The inclination to protect the status quo must give way to a spirit of innovation and experimentation; it is those qualities—not politics—that must govern professional advancements within the system.

8. We must put our money where our mouths are and bring spending in line with the new priorities. That means shifting resources that currently support administrative functions to the front lines to bolster the education of children.

9. There are no shortcuts. To do more and do better, students, staff and parents will have to invest more time and energy to education.

10. Schools cannot do the job alone. As panelist Ernest Boyer stated, "You cannot have an island of excellence in a sea of indifference."

and time to work with students who need special attention. That means adopting a version of the Asian model, where teachers teach classes only two or three hours a day. To accomplish this, in some cases, class sizes will have to be larger than they are now.

- Do away with most school-based specialist positions. Then allow some teachers to assume additional special duties for extra pay. More can be achieved with less by integrating services.

- Expand the pool of prospective teachers by opening candidacy to anyone of sound character who can demonstrate expert command of subject matter and a desire to work with children. The rationale is simple: Although knowledge of subject matter is no guarantee of good teaching, lack of it guarantees bad teaching.

- Develop a training institute where teachers and administrators learn state-of-the-art findings in their fields, in teaching methods, in technology and in other areas such as leadership skills, to manage change and improve learner outcomes. A professional development school provides a way to link teacher preparation, support for beginning teachers and continuing renewal of teacher skill and knowledge.

- Stimulate new approaches to teacher preparation. Most of our teachers graduate from N.C. institutions. As one of their prime customers, CMS has the clout to insist on change. It's time to play that card.

RECOMMENDATION #12: **Reapportioning power**

The panel recommends a radical shift in power to the front lines of education. Schoolhouse professionals should be free to organize themselves subject only to a simple market test of student success as defined by the system. Once academic standards are clearly identified, schools need to be cut loose to decide how best to get the job done for their students. Borrowing from businesses that have catapulted to the top of their trades, the principles of autonomy, flexibility, competition and accountability must reign supreme.

Implementing strategies:

- Survey staff to determine things they would like to do but think they can't. Then trace the origin of the constraints to figure out whether they are, in fact, real or merely a matter of custom and tradition.

- Rescind local rules and regulations that run counter to authentic reform. Seek waivers from the state and federal governments for the rest. It's unfair to hold schools responsible for outcomes

unless they control the process.

- Build a system to hold schools fully accountable for achieving results, with real rewards for high performance and significant consequences for failure—not to single out winners and losers, but to create powerful incentives for improvement and positive demonstrable results.

- Allow all schools that want to, to opt out of district control to determine their own organization, teaching methods, management, staffing and spending. As long as district goals are reached, schoolhouse professionals deserve our trust to do right by their students.

- Give each school a "sunny day" fund teachers can use for instructional innovations.

- Make the central office sell its services to schools. School staffs, armed with budgets of their own, could decide to buy services (e.g., textbooks, itinerant services, staff training) from the central office or from outside suppliers. The central office, faced with the pressures of supply and demand, will have to offer the services needed or go out of business.

- Establish creativity contracts. To prevent complacency and staleness, staff would compete for three-year special postings with the opportunity to re compete for that or other positions at term's end. There would be no automatic reassignment. This would include all administrative and specialist positions.

RECOMMENDATION #13: **Parents**

The panel recommends paying as much attention to improving parenting and parental relations as to reforming schools. Parents make a huge difference in how much and how well their children learn, and they are the majority shareholder of the time children spend out of school. Parents are, therefore, schools' most important partners in facilitating and reinforcing students' "jobs" to work hard to learn challenging subject matter. It's time to invest properly in the relationship and stop trying to do it on the cheap.

Implementing strategies:

- Hire a parent liaison for every school.

- Adopt the Comer approach to parental involvement across the board, in all schools. The Comer method melds home and school life, and reaches deeply beyond school walls and school hours to do it.

- Establish a Preschool Parent Teacher Association.

- Use a variety of new technologies to communicate regularly with parents about what happened

139
*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

in school that day, including homework assignments and upcoming tests.

■ Launch a public service advertising campaign in conjunction with parents that identifies key home-life components of successful learning. Much like dietary recommendations from health organizations, the list might suggest children get a good night's sleep, do one hour of reading a night and another hour of physical activity, sit down with the family for at least one meal and limit TV to two hours a day.

RECOMMENDATION #14:

Community support

The panel recommends that the community pitch in. Estimates are that 91 percent of youngsters' lives are spent outside of school. Parents, churches, social welfare organizations, employers and a variety of other institutions are the custodians of that time. That means responsibility for educating children does not—cannot—belong to teachers and schools alone.

Implementing strategies:

■ Ask local employers and colleges to hold students accountable by creating real consequences for doing well in school and real consequences for doing poorly. If there are no real-life consequences to not performing well, students won't put forth the effort.

■ Ask newspapers to dedicate a daily section to education just as they do to sports. Unless the community unites to elevate the status of schooling, there is little chance for widespread improvement.

■ Mobilize the community to provide early childhood services, whether they be programs at libraries, museums, zoos and shopping malls, or affordable day care.

■ Ask businesses to open their doors to students for vocational training and community service opportunities and to teachers for staff development.

■ Urge employers to grant parents leave time to volunteer in schools, attend parent conferences and regularly communicate with their children's schools.

■ Sign up volunteer mentors to fulfill the pledge to give every energetic and deserving child that critical extra boost needed for success.

■ Ask the community how Charlotte can create neighborhoods for learning. Schools would guide, not provide, these services.

■ Produce an annual report card on how well the community is doing.

Measures of success

THE FOLLOWING ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT outcomes, student participation rates and customer satisfaction ratings will serve as our benchmarks of success:

■ Students demonstrate competency over challenging subject matter in the five core areas of math, English, science, history and geography as measured by the new criterion-referenced tests and a host of authentic assessments.

■ The percentage of students who score in the top quartiles of national assessments in science, history and geography increases significantly, and the distribution of minority students more closely reflects the student population as a whole.

■ On national assessments in which Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools can participate, students lead the nation in reading and computational skills by the turn of the century.

■ On international comparisons in which CMS can participate, or other measures of rigor such as SATs and ACTs, students score well above the national average.

■ The number of students who are competent in a second language increases substantially.

■ The number of students meeting International Baccalaureate and/or Advanced Placement standards doubles in three years.

■ The percentage of preschoolers coming to school ready to learn rises significantly each year.

■ Students take a rigorous college-preparatory course of study, including algebra and geometry.

■ Students who enter the apprenticeship or the "two-plus-two" program are successful in securing high-skill jobs upon graduation.

■ College acceptance rates of poor and minority children skyrocket.

■ The dropout rate drops dramatically over time. The gap in high school graduation rates between black and white students is eliminated.

■ Suspension and exclusion rates drop significantly at every level of schooling, and the gap between black and white suspensions is eliminated.

■ Parent satisfaction with schools is high.

■ Employer satisfaction with students is high.

■ Students' performance in the first year of college is above average.





they have to
on hard matrices.

math on Fi



What Should Unions Do?

To American managers, unions are part of the problem. In the most competitive countries, they are part of the solution.

By John Hoerr

BY ANY STANDARD, THE 1980S HAVE been a difficult decade for the American worker. When inflation is taken into account, average weekly earnings have dropped more than 30 percent since 1969. Dislocations caused by takeovers, shutdowns, and downsizings have pushed mistrust of corporations to new heights. Disgruntled employees are filing record numbers of wrongful discharge suits and job-discrimination and unfair-labor practice complaints. And in the workplace, employees are demanding more challenging work, a voice in decision making, and greater job security.

In the past, turmoil on this scale would have driven workers into unions. Not today. Only twenty years ago, nearly 30 percent of private-sector

workers belonged to unions. By 1990, union membership in private industry had dropped to 12.1 percent of the work force, reducing organized labor to what Harvard economist Richard B. Freeman has recently labeled "ghetto unionism." If this trend continues, by the year 2000, the union share of the private-sector work force will shrink to 5 percent.

Ask a manager to explain this seeming paradox between worker discontent and union decline and it's likely he or she will say something like the following: the rules of the economic game have changed. Competition is global, technological innovation continuous, the work force increasingly professional. In such an economic environment, unions are ill suited to meeting the needs of either workers or companies. At best, they are an irrelevance—a leftover from a previous industrial era. At worst, they are an obstacle to making companies and countries competitive. Little wonder, then, that unions are on the wane.

What this perspective overlooks, however, is that radical union decline is a peculiarly American phenomenon. After all, companies around the world have been going through the same sea change brought on by new technologies and global competition. But while U.S. union membership (measured as a percentage of all nonfarm employ-

143

American Federation of Teachers: A QuEST Reader

John Hoerr is a business journalist who has specialized in labor-management relations. He is the author of And the Wolf Finally Came: The Decline of the American Steel Industry (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988).

Reprinted by permission of Harvard Business Review. "What Should Unions Do?" by John Hoerr (May-June 1991). Copyright © 1991 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College; all rights reserved.

ees, including those in the public sector) has declined by nearly 50 percent during the past two decades, in other industrial countries, it has dropped only slightly (from 58 percent to 50 percent in the United Kingdom, from 32 percent to 28 percent in Japan) or stayed steady (at roughly 43 percent in Germany and 36 percent in Canada) or even increased considerably (for example, from 79 percent to 96 percent in Sweden). The most competitive national economies—in particular, Germany and Japan—seem to combine technologically advanced and highly competitive companies with far higher levels of unionization than in the United States.

This suggests that while a particular kind of unionism may be obsolete, unionism per se is not. Instead of speculating whether U.S. unions will—or should—survive, it is more interesting to ask: What kind of unionism makes social and econom-

ic sense given the new realities of global competition? In 1984, Freeman and his Harvard colleague James L. Medoff published their now classic study, *What Do Unions Do?* Today the question is: What *should* unions do?

The materials discussed here (see box) offer a powerful answer to that question. Taken together, they represent a new way of thinking about unions and their place in the new economy. On the one hand, they challenge the widely held view that unions are irrelevant. On the other, they are equally critical of “business as usual” as it exists at many U.S. unions today. Finally, they suggest lessons that both companies and unions in the United States can learn from unionism as practiced elsewhere.

THREE THEMES IN PARTICULAR EMERGE from this research.

1. U.S. unions face the same crisis as U.S. management: dealing with the new realities of global competition.

Unions don't exist in isolation. They are part of an entire industrial relations system—the network of interlocking institutions of management, labor, and government that grew up in the era of the mass-production economy. In the last decade, economic and technological changes have rendered many aspects of these institutions obsolete. Now companies and unions must jointly reform the system they jointly built.

2. Unions aren't necessarily an obstacle to competitiveness; indeed, under the right circumstances, they can make a pivotal contribution to it.

Much as companies are struggling to define new ways of managing, a new model of unionism is emerging that puts unions at the very center of companies' efforts to improve their competitiveness. In a world where success in the marketplace increasingly depends on creating more flexible, team-based work organizations, unions can be a surprisingly effective means to integrate employees into managerial decision making. Similarly, the lack of an institution that gives voice to workers' interests and perspectives can block companies' efforts to adapt to change. Put simply, strong unions can make stronger companies.

3. To act in this capacity, however, U.S. unions must reinvent themselves as much as companies are trying to do.

The U.S. industrial-relations system cannot be reinvigorated unless unions carve out a new role for themselves. They must develop a vision of how workers should help shape the technological and social revolution that is transforming the workplace. They must identify new “leverage points” for union influence. Finally, they must improve

On the Future of Unions

Governing the Workplace: The Future of Labor and Employment Law by Paul C. Weiler, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990.

Unions and Economic Competitiveness edited by Lawrence Mishel and Paula B. Voos, New York, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1991.

Democracy at Work: Changing World Markets and the Future of Labor Unions by Lowell Turner, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991.

A Partnership in the Workplace. A joint agreement between Corning, Inc. and the American Flint Glass Workers Union, January 1989.

“Industrial Restructuring and Vocational Training: A Strategic Role for Unions?” by Wolfgang Streeck, Unpublished paper, Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin-Madison, July 1990.

New Forms of Work Organization: The Challenge for North American Unions by Tom Rankin, Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1990.

The New Owners: The Mass Emergence of Employee Ownership in Public Companies and What It Means to American Business by Joseph R. Blasi and Douglass L. Kruse, New York, New York: Harper Business, 1991.

“American Unions and the Future of Worker Representation” by Thomas A. Kochan and Kirsten R. Wever in *The State of the Unions*, edited by George Strauss, Jack Fiorito, and Daniel Gallagher, Madison, Wisconsin: Industrial Relations Research Association, 1991.

Economic Notes, New York, New York: Labor Research Association, November-December 1990.

144

The Task
Before Us:
A QuEST
Reader

their own human resources to help put labor's new vision into practice.

Managers unconcerned—or gleeful—about the growing weakness of U.S. unions should remember one thing. Industrial relations, like nature, abhors a vacuum. As traditional unions decline, new institutions and practices will take their place. They won't necessarily be better for companies or for the economy.

This is the important implication of *Governing the Workplace* by Harvard law professor Paul C. Weiler. According to Weiler, the decline of unions has created a political and legal vacuum—a “governance gap”—that can only damage relationships between managers and workers and the ability of the U.S. economy to compete. Weiler explains what's wrong with recent alternatives to traditional collective bargaining and why “union representation is as attractive a form of governance as we have yet been able to devise.”

As traditional collective bargaining has declined, argues Weiler, two alternatives have risen to take its place. The first is government regulation. During the past fifteen years, legal challenges have systematically eroded the traditional concept of “employment at will,” which held that managers could fire workers at any time for any reason. In over forty states, courts now allow employees to sue companies for wrongful discharge; plaintiffs' attorneys are doing a thriving business. State and federal laws regulating work relationships—such as restrictions on polygraph testing—have also proliferated.

The second alternative is the development of more professional human resource programs at companies. In effect, these programs are meant to fill a unionlike role and convince employees that they don't need an independent union. They include mechanisms like quality circles to involve employees in decisions on the job and nonunion grievance procedures for dispensing workplace justice.

Both these systems have their virtues—and their drawbacks. Government regulation, for example, has the advantage of protecting the interests of *all* employees, not just union members. But regulation is a blunt axe and can often produce requirements in the law that bear little resemblance to workplace reality—from both workers' and managers' perspectives. Laws tend to work best where unions are present to make sure the laws are enforced. The fact is, nonunion employees are at greater risk of suffering from employer abuses—no matter what the letter of the law may say. At the same time, a panoply of standardized government-imposed rules administered by government agencies is likely to be a greater

obstacle to managerial flexibility than unions ever were.

The human resource alternative to unions also has positive aspects, especially where the HR staff conceives of its role as the “neutral” representative of employees. But there's the rub. In the end, no company will put the interests of employees over the interests of shareholders in a direct conflict—if the stakes are high enough. Thus the human resource approach tends to break down precisely where companies need it most: in situations of severe conflict. The very best HR systems recognize this fact by going to great lengths to build fairness into nonunion grievance procedures. But only a small handful—probably fewer than a half dozen—take the ultimate step of allowing for outside arbitration as a last resort.

The trouble with both alternatives, argues Weiler, is that neither provides workers with an independent source of power inside the company. Laws that define workers' basic legal rights don't necessarily ensure that workers can exercise these rights free of coercion. And too much regulation from outside impedes efficiency. Human resource programs, on the other hand, give workers some influence inside the company, but they are not an independent source of power. Collective bargaining is the only American institution that gives workers the ability to claim both kinds of protection—from outside and inside.

For managers who know their history, Weiler's governance gap should sound familiar: the previous system of U.S. industrial relations went through a similar crisis in the early decades of this century. For a brief period in the late 1800s, U.S. unions had a firm foothold in factories organized around production by skilled artisans, such as moulders and puddlers in the early iron industry. But in the first quarter of the twentieth century, corporations shifted to mass-production systems based on mass markets, standardized products, unskilled labor and the “scientific management” of work as articulated by Frederick W. Taylor. As a result, the artisan-dominated craft unions become increasingly obsolete. For the better part of forty years, the craft unions all but ignored this development—as well as the growing numbers of unskilled immigrants working in the new factories. Meanwhile, antiunion companies tried to create their own institutions—company unions or Ford's Sociological Department—to regulate labor-management relations.

IT TOOK THE ENORMOUS SOCIAL DISLOCATION of the Great Depression and the bitter labor conflicts of the 1930s to create a new system of industrial relations. The new “industrial unions”

145
*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

broke definitively with the traditional craft model to organize all workers—skilled and unskilled alike—in an entire industry.

Seen from the vantage point of today, it is easy to forget just how successful industrial unionism was—and not just for union members but for the economy as a whole. The new industrial unions created procedures to protect workers from arbitrary treatment on the job. But the labor-relations system that grew up around industrial unionism did far more than that. By organizing all the major companies in steel, auto, rubber, and other mass-production industries, industrial unions successfully took wages out of competition. This put a stop to the destructive wage cutting among companies that had often taken place during downturns. And by raising living standards for a broad segment of society, industrial unionism made possible the mass consumption on which a healthy mass-production economy depended. In the post-war era, U.S. companies and unions thrived on the rapid growth in productivity and output made possible by mass production and its economies of scale.

But the very success of industrial unionism also sowed the seeds of its eventual decline. In order to defend workers against the abuses of scientific management, the new industrial unions accepted, even embraced, all that went with it—in particular, the rigid separation of thinking from doing, “managing” from “working.” Cut off from decision-making responsibilities, unions focused on protecting workers from exploitation by using Taylorism as a base of shopfloor power. They negotiated multiple job classifications, linked wage rates to the job instead of a worker’s skills, and established seniority as the basis for promotion. This “job control unionism” gave unions a negative power to hamstring management but not a positive power to influence operations. Rules bred more rules, eventually straitjacketing the production system and creating unproductive hierarchies in both companies and unions.

The costs of this system were obscured as long as the U.S. mass-production economy dominated the world. But since the late 1960s, changes in the world economy have threatened to leave both U.S. companies and unions behind. In a global econo-

In other countries, unions have been integrated into managerial decision making.

my, wage competition is also global. And under the impact of changing markets and technologies, companies around the world are scrapping the old mass-production systems and converting to flexible manufacturing, flattening hierarchies, blurring the boundaries among functions and jobs, and encouraging—indeed, demanding—that workers make critical decisions on the factory floor.

Neither traditional American management nor American unionism fits in well with this new economic environment—a fact that even strong union supporters now recognize. *Unions and Economic Competitiveness*, a collection of essays by labor economists and industrial-relations specialists sympathetic to unions, focuses on the difficulty that both companies and unions have had in adapting to the new rules of global competition.

In the absence of strong foreign competition, argues Richard Freeman in one essay, unions could safely bargain for a share of the “monopoly rents” charged by U.S. companies. By the 1970s, however, this was no longer economically feasible. “What worked for unions in the 1950s and 1960s did not work in the 1970s and 1980s,” concludes Freeman, “and it took too much time for labor and management to realize this.”

Former Secretary of Labor Ray Marshall makes a similar point about the 1990s in another essay in *Unions and Economic Competitiveness*. Because mass production was more entrenched in the United States than it was in any other nation in the world, both managers and unionists are “more reluctant to abandon the adversarial and authoritarian systems that it produced.” As a result, genuine worker participation is a great deal less pervasive in the United States than it is elsewhere.

In other countries, unions have followed a very different trajectory. Instead of being excluded, they have been integrated into managerial decision making. In Japan, with its generally peaceful labor relations, management invites union involvement to improve productivity and quality. In Germany and Scandinavia, on the other hand, laws require participation. In either case, the entrenched position of unions allows them not only to withstand the winds of economic change but also to make a positive contribution to corporate restructuring.

For an idea of what this more dynamic form of unionism looks like, consider the example of Germany, as described in *Democracy at Work* by Cornell professor Lowell Turner. That country’s

"codetermination" law, which mandates representation for unions and salaried employees on the supervisory boards of all large companies, is well known. Far more significant for managerial decision making are the plant-level "works councils," elected bodies of employees also required by law at every work site.

Although legally independent of both management and union, works councils are usually dominated by union activists, who imbue them with the philosophy and policies of their national union. The influence of the works councils varies from company to company. But in many workplaces, they play an extremely active role—sometimes amounting to veto power—in all matters involving hiring, firing, training, and reassignment in the event of reorganization and technological change.

This is especially true in Germany's vast metal-working sector, where some 2.6 million workers belong to IG Metall, the nation's largest union. Like other German unions, it negotiates guidelines for pay levels, hours, and working conditions on a regional basis. Works councils at each plant then translate the guidelines into local agreements.

TURNER'S STUDY FOCUSES PARTICULARLY ON Volkswagen's huge plant at Wolfsburg (in Lower Saxony near the former border of East Germany), which employs some 62,000 people. Like auto factories the world over, Wolfsburg must adjust to rapid changes in the international car market. Management is cutting costs and employment levels and wants to install more efficient work practices. Instead of waiting to be consulted, the 69-member works council—62 seats are held by IG Metall members—is taking the initiative to make sure the plant restructuring also works to the benefit of employees and conforms to union philosophy.

Take the example of team-based manufacturing, a strategy recently adopted by German auto companies as one means of competing with the Japanese. As VW and other producers began moving in this direction, IG Metall developed its own set of "group work" concepts designed to protect workers from layoff or transfer to lower-paying jobs. The program emphasizes retraining and a work organization that gives employees real decision-making power. In 1988, works councilors from all VW plants adopted the union program. Now VW management must negotiate on that agenda if it wishes to install teamwork.

IG Metall's interest in work reorganization illustrates how a union can take the lead on important issues instead of merely reacting to a company proposal—and in the process force management to change its own thinking. The union's

group-work policies are the product of nearly two decades of research and activism. In the early 1970s, the union's national staff of "work humanization" specialists began research on work reforms to address rising discontent on auto assembly lines. Despite management's lack of interest at the time, the union kept track of changing technologies and promoted its own vision of what the content and shape of work should be. And now that the companies too want to reorganize work, the union, with its strong influence in the works councils, has the power to turn its vision into reality.

Turner argues that this system is a potent mechanism for smoothing the company's adaptation to new competitive realities. Partly because of a strong union and active works councils, VW weathered the demise of the Beetle in the mid-1970s, various market crises, and recessions in the 1980s without major disruptions. Unlike auto producers in most other countries, VW did not lay off workers or demand wage concessions in the early 1980s.

Of course, strong unions like IG Metall also impose constraints on management that make managing harder. But in certain situations, such constraints can be enabling. The pressure that IG Metall puts on German companies forces them to keep and retrain workers, use labor more flexibly, and move into diversified, quality, high-volume production. And in the long run, VW is likely to have a work force that is much more committed to a new way of working than would be in the case in a nonunion enterprise.

Turner's book compares the IG Metall experience with that of its U.S. counterpart, the United Auto Workers (UAW). While the UAW is involved in some very advanced worker participation efforts—especially, what amounts to co-management with General Motors of the Saturn plant in Spring Hill, Tennessee—it has had only scattered successes. According to Turner, this is largely because authoritarian traditions persist at many auto plants. Even when managers introduce more participatory organizational structures, they usually do so unilaterally—sometimes pressuring the local union to accept them under the threat of a plant shutdown.

Turner suggests that lack of an active union role in company decision making goes a long way toward explaining the crisis of the U.S. auto industry. In the absence of institutional mechanisms such as those provided by the German works councils, there is no sure way for companies to integrate employees into the change process. Instead of defeating or marginalizing unions, Turner argues, U.S. companies need to accept them as legitimate partners in participation. And

147

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*

unions, "in the interest of their own survival," need to jettison their traditional passivity and start making positive contributions to company performance in the areas of productivity, product quality, and process flexibility.

To that end, many of the authors of the texts cited here argue for laws mandating worker participation—along the lines of those in Germany and other European nations. Weiler, for example, says that every workplace with twenty-five employees or more should have an Employee Participation Committee (EPC) with members elected by all employees. Modeled on the German works council, the EPC would have to be consulted on all decisions affecting the work force and would have a voice on a far broader range of subjects than provided by traditional collective bargaining.

Weiler concedes that mandatory participation laws have no chance of being enacted in the near future. Companies, not without reason, would regard the EPC as a precursor to a union. Unions would view the EPC as a company union, designed to keep "real" unions out of the workplace. Without such a legal mandate, participation may never become as pervasive in the United States as it is in Germany. Still, some U.S. companies have voluntarily installed highly participative work systems. As other essays in *Unions and Economic Competitiveness* indicate, American-style worker participation—with unions—can work very well indeed.

SINCE THE 1960s, WHEN TEAM-BASED PRODUCTION began on a very small scale in the United States, the most publicized examples generally have come from nonunion plants. As a result, managers have commonly assumed that nonunion companies are better at worker participation and employee involvement than union companies are. But according to recent research reported in *Unions and Economic Competitiveness*, this is no longer the case.

For example, economists Adrienne E. Eaton of Rutgers and Paula B. Voos of the University of Wisconsin have recently analyzed an extensive 1987 survey of innovative practices at large nonunion and union companies, conducted by the federal government's General Accounting Office. Nonunion companies led in only one such prac-

Providing workers with training through joint labor-management programs is an especially attractive role for unions to play.

tice—the use of profit-sharing plans. But profit sharing does not require a fundamental restructuring of a company and is a weak motivator unless accompanied by employee participation.

On the other hand, a production system organized around self-managing teams forces the most deep-seated changes and produces the best results in terms of productivity and quality. The General Accounting Office data show that by 1987 unionized companies reported more use of teamwork than nonunion companies. "The nonunion sector is no longer more innovative than the union sector," write Eaton and Voos, "if in fact it ever was."

In a similar study, Maryellen R. Kelley of Carnegie-Mellon and Bennett Harrison of MIT examine the experience of more than

1,000 manufacturing plants that used labor-management problem-solving committees in the 1980s. The nonunion workplaces were not only less likely to provide workers with real protection such as job security but were also significantly less efficient than the unionized plants.

What explains such findings? According to Eaton and Voos, most team-based work systems in a unionized setting are the product of a formal quid pro quo. The union agrees to eliminate old work rules to make way for team production. In exchange, it usually wins improved job security, gain-sharing, or higher wages. Because "unions have more to trade," they "can bargain better than nonunion workers [who] have no institutions to represent them." And since most joint programs in unionized plants emphasize the quality-of-work-life goals of workers as well as the productivity goals of management, these programs tend to have greater legitimacy. Thus they are more likely to survive. "Ironically," write Eaton and Voos, "it is precisely because unionized workers can say 'no' as a group that they can also collectively say 'yes.'"

One company that is realizing the benefits of union participation in work redesign is Corning. The company is converting all of its twenty-eight U.S. factories to team-based production in partnership with the American Flint Glass Workers union (AFGW). The company decided a few years ago it could remain competitive only by giving line workers more responsibility in decisions about production. Corning is now in the midst of rooting out old production lines and retraining

virtually all of its 20,000 employees to work in the new systems. About two-thirds of these workers need remedial education in reading and math.

Corning's initial decision to shift to self-managing work teams was made by management alone. But it wasn't until the AFGW, which represents most of Corning's hourly workers, became actively involved—or, in the intriguing metaphor used by both managers and unionists, “bought ownership”—that the restructuring surged ahead. Eventually, the two sides articulated an extraordinary new relationship in a short, clearly worded philosophical statement called “A Partnership in the Workplace.” Among six “essential values” listed in the agreement are: “recognition of the rights of workers to participate in decisions that affect their working lives” and “a work environment free of arbitrary and authoritarian attitudes.”

At Corning, the union has influence over the content and administration of all company training programs. At about a dozen plants, plant redesign committees, including shop-floor workers, are now devising plans for restructuring jobs. Self-managing teams have been installed in sections of more than twenty plants, and company and union officials are starting the redesign process in the others. As part of the new partnership, employees cannot work themselves out of a job through this massive involvement effort. If more efficient practices enable Corning to reduce the work force, it will do so by attrition.

Unfortunately, initiatives like that of Corning and the AFGW are exceptions. Just as striking as Eaton and Voos's finding that teamwork is more prevalent at union plants is the fact that team-based work systems are still so rare in *both* union and nonunion sectors in the United States. For the most part, managers remain unwilling to part with authority or to manage the social revolution that's needed to change a company's culture. As a consequence, it appears that unions will have to transform themselves and, in the process, hasten the transformation of the entire U.S. industrial relations system.

IF A NEW KIND OF UNIONISM CAN CONTRIBUTE to competitiveness, how should U.S. unions reorganize to bring it about? Put another way, what are the leverage points for redefining union influence in the new economy? Consider four: training, work redesign, employee ownership, and the new work force.

The training dilemma facing most U.S. corporations is by now thoroughly familiar. Global competition requires a skilled work force. And yet, most companies devote few resources to training line workers because they fear that other compa-

nies will snap them up. Similarly, most workers lack incentives to buy training for themselves.

With the exception of the building trades, unions have traditionally left training to management. But in recent years, some unions have begun to play a more active role in employee training—largely in response to shifts in markets or to rapid technological change. For example, the UAW jointly runs training institutes with the Big Three auto makers. So does the Communications Workers of America (CWA) with AT&T. And the United Steelworkers (USW) will soon start a Career Development Institute funded by major steel producers. All these programs are designed to ensure that workers can acquire the skills they need to remain employable in a more competitive economy.

Providing workers with training through joint labor-management programs is an especially attractive role for unions to play. Training is one area where the overlap between labor's concerns for social justice and companies' concerns about competitiveness is great. In a provocative paper entitled “Industrial Restructuring and Vocational Training: A Strategic Role for Unions?” University of Wisconsin sociologist Wolfgang Streeck argues that union involvement in “skill formation” will play the equivalent role in the new economy that wage formation played in the mass-production era.

A related leverage point, as the Volkswagen and Corning examples make clear, is work redesign. It may be a long time before most U.S. companies have works councils. But local unions can begin today to represent employee interests and concerns on work-restructuring projects. *New Forms of Work Organization* by Canadian labor consultant Tom Rankin provides a rich portrait of how a new-model local union operates. His book is an extensive study of an advanced work system at Shell Canada's Sarnia, Ontario, chemical plant. For more than a decade, workers have been running the Shell plant through a network of semiautonomous work teams designed jointly by the company and the Energy and Chemical Workers Union (ECWU).

Like the team plants at Corning and other companies, the Sarnia system has no resemblance either to Taylorism or to job-control unionism. There are only two work classifications—process operators and maintenance technicians. One process team runs the entire plant on each shift. The average team member can perform 70 percent of the tasks required to run the plant. Pay is linked to skill and knowledge, rather than to the job itself or to seniority.

There is little rule making at Sarnia; instead,

149

American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader

labor and management make decisions based on values expressed in a philosophical statement. Conditions of employment are continually renegotiated as circumstances dictate. For instance, managers and workers jointly agreed to switch from an eight-hour to a twelve-hour shift by majority vote—a change that in a traditional union setting would have required amending the formal labor contract. Team members train one another, participate in hiring new workers, and settle most grievances on their own. From the local union's perspective, its efforts at Sarnia are an attempt to shape the work organization "in a direction consistent with a democratic vision of the workplace," writes Rankin. At the same time, intense worker involvement has also made the plant extremely efficient; output has gone as high as 195 percent of design capacity.

UNION INFLUENCE OVER TRAINING AND work redesign makes sense where unions already exist. But there are also leverage points for unions even where they do not have the formal right to represent workers. In particular, two long-term social trends may constitute the union equivalent of growth markets: employee ownership and the expanding presence of women and minorities in the workplace.

In *The New Owners*, Joseph R. Blasi and Douglass L. Kruse of Rutgers University chart the startling rise in employee ownership at publicly traded U.S. corporations. This trend extends well beyond equity stakes granted to workers in Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs), which are usually at privately held companies. Public corporations have also been transferring large quantities of stock to their employees through 401(k) savings plans, in which both employee and employer contributions are invested in the company's stock, profit-sharing payments made in the form of stock, employee stock-purchase plans, equity reimbursements in return for salary and benefit cuts, and stock options programs.

Blasi and Kruse calculate that 10.8 million workers own an average of 12.1 percent of the stock in 1,000 public companies. By the year 2000, they estimate, more than a quarter of publicly traded companies will be at least 15 percent owned by their employees. These employee-owners could exceed the total membership of the entire union movement. What will happen when employees discover the degree to which they own their companies, and, in particular, the extent to which their life savings and retirement funds are tied up in a single company's stock? Like other constituencies, they may want to organize to

demand more voice as owners.

This development should challenge unions to rethink their traditional opposition to employee ownership. Unionists are generally skeptical about employee ownership because they think that relying on stock ownership as a retirement benefit (which is the normal practice in many ESOP companies) is not a good idea. But as employee ownership spreads, some kind of institution will have to give voice to the interests of employee-owners. It is not inconceivable that unions could play such a role in the future.

One union that has overcome its skepticism and learned how to increase its strength and influence through ESOPs is the Steelworkers. The severe recessions of the 1980s left scores of metalworking companies on the verge of bankruptcy. To avoid shutdowns, the USW began using ESOPs to mount worker buyouts. It also has formed ESOP partnerships with management in healthy companies. As of early 1991, the union was involved in ESOPs at twenty-five companies, many of which are majority worker-owned. The companies range in size from fewer than 50 to 4,000 workers.

The USW in no sense "runs" these companies, but it stamps its influence on them. To make sure workers aren't dependent on the price of the company stock for their retirement benefits, the union demands a pension plan along with stock ownership. It also requires that the company pass through full stock-voting rights to employees and set up an extensive worker-participation program—thus guaranteeing an employee role in work restructuring. Finally, the USW demands board representation in companies substantially owned by an ESOP. Workers and their representatives now sit on the boards of seventeen companies.

The idea of labor sitting on the board is highly unpopular with most managers—and with not a small number of unionists. Still, if unions really want a voice in managerial decision making, then they must be prepared to take responsibility at the highest strategic levels of a company. Union representation on the board has worked out well in the USW companies, though the union has had to invent a set of procedures to govern the practice. Typically, the board of an ESOP company includes one or more members of the local union, as well as one member nominated by the USW president. The outside representatives usually are either technical experts—for example, ESOP lawyers or economists—or prominent retired union officials from the Steelworkers or other unions. Wary of possible conflicts of interest, the national union does not try to influence how they vote. At most, the union directors are expected to

150

*The Task
Before Us:
A QuEST
Reader*

bring employees' perspectives to decision making.

Finally, just as corporate managers are confronting the challenge of managing diversity, unions are struggling to find ways to meet the needs of new social groups entering the workplace. In "American Unions and the Future of Worker Representation," MIT's Thomas A. Kochan and Northeastern University's Kirsten R. Wever cite the much quoted statistic that four-fifths of new entrants to the work force between now and the year 2000 will be women, immigrants, or members of a minority group. They traditionally have had trouble getting jobs with a promise of high pay and career status. According to Kochan and Wever, the challenge for unions in the 1990s is to do for this new work force what they did for industrial workers half a century ago: "improve low-wage jobs held by people with little labor market power who are outside the realm of traditional union constituencies."

Some of the most creative union organizing efforts are aimed at these groups. Consider two examples (both reported in *Economic Notes*, the bi-monthly newsletter of the nonprofit Labor Research Association).

In California, eighteen locals of the Communications Workers of America have sponsored an Association for Workplace Justice. Aimed at educating nonunion employees about their rights on the job, the association operates a toll-free Workplace Rights Hotline and conducts workshops on employment law.

The International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) is using unorthodox organizing techniques to reach the more than 100,000 immigrants who work in garment shops in Los Angeles, El Paso, and New York City. They speak little English, usually do not understand their legal rights, and are afraid to jeopardize their jobs.

**In the end,
the challenge
facing orga-
nized labor is
to reinvent
the institu-
tions on
which a
sustainable,
competitive
economy
depends.**

Working with community groups, the ILGWU counsels these people on their rights under immigration and labor law and teaches them English as a second language. The union takes them in as "associate members" at dues often as low as \$1 a month. In some cases, these associate members go on to win formal union representation at their shops. Here, the union role may be a combination of old- and new-style unionism: gaining jobs and justice for the unorganized and helping to train and stabilize the new work force.

Of course, if unions are to make a serious contribution in any of these new areas, perhaps the biggest challenge of all will be an internal one: developing their own human resources. As the global economy becomes more complex and the efforts of companies to respond to it more diverse, unions are going to have to learn new

skills and develop new kinds of expertise. The union leader of the future will, most likely, have to combine the political instincts of the traditional organizer with the business savvy of the best global manager. During the past few years, a small but dynamic cottage industry of "pro-union" investment bankers, pension analysts, MBA-trained management consultants, work-organization specialists, and the like has grown up to help unions represent their members at a time of constant company restructuring. This may represent the first step in developing the broad managerial and organizational skills that unions increasingly need.

If unions can develop these skills, all the while staying true to their basic social vision, the economy as a whole will benefit. In the end, the challenge facing organized labor is not so different from that facing business—to reinvent the institutions on which a sustainable, competitive economy depends.

151

*American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader*





References

152

*The Task
Before Us:
A QuEST
Reader*

Chapter 2

Putting Children First
by William A. Galston
from *American Educator*.

¹Mare, Robert D. and Winship, Christopher, "Socio-economic Change and the Decline of Marriage for Blacks and Whites." In *The Urban Underclass*, edited by Christopher Jencks and Paul Peterson. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institute, 1991.

²Smith, Douglas A., Jarjoura, G. Roger, "Social Structure and Criminal Victimization." In *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, Vol. 25, No. 1, February 1988.

³Guidubaldi, J., Cleminshaw, H.K., Perry, J.D., Nastasi, B.K., and Lightel, J., "The Role of Selected Family Environment Factors in Children's Post-Divorce Adjustment." In *Family Relations*, Vol. 35, 1986.

⁴Wallerstein, Judith S., and Blakeslee, Sandra, *Second Chances: Men, Women, and Children a Decade after Divorce*. New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1989.

⁵Zakariya, Sally Banks, "Another Look at the Children of Divorce," *Principal Magazine*, September 1982, p. 35. See also, R.B. Zajonc, "Family Configuration and Intelligence," *Science*, Vol. 192, April 16, 1976, pp. 227-236. In a later and more methodologically sophisticated study, the authors try to define more completely

what it is about two-parent families that make them better at preparing students for educational success. Income clearly stands out as the most important variable; but the close relationship between one-parent status, lower income, and lack of time for things like homework help and attendance at parent-teacher conferences—to name a few of the variables considered—led the authors to say that "the negative effects of living in a one-parent family work primarily through other variables in our model." Ann M. Milne, David E. Myers, Alvin S. Rosenthal, and Alan Ginsburg, "Single Parents, Working Mothers, and the Educational Achievement of School Children," *Sociology of Education*, 1986, Vol. 59 (July), p. 132.

⁶Glendon, Mary Ann, *Abortion and Divorce in Western Law*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987 (pp. 93-95).

Chapter 4

**Do Private Schools Outperform
Public Schools?**

by Albert Shanker and Bella Rosenberg
from *American Educator*.

Bryk, Anthony S. and Lee, Valerie E. (1992, December). Is politics the problem and markets the answer? An essay review of *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools. Economics of Education Review*, volume 11, number 4, pp. 439-451.

Chubb, John E. and Moe, Terry M. (1991, July 26). The private vs. public school debate. *Wall Street Journal*.

Chubb, John E. and Moe, Terry M. (1990). *Politics, Markets & America's Schools*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institute.

Coleman, James S. (1981). Response to Page and Keith. *Educational Researcher*, 10, 18-20.

Coleman, James S., Hoffer, Thomas, and Kilgore, Sally. (1981). Public and private high schools. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education.

Goldberg, Kirsten. (1988, March 9). "Gravest threat" to private schools is better public ones, Finn warns. *Education Week*, p. 1.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (1993, April). NAEP 1992 mathematics report card for the nation and the states: Data from the national and trial state assessments. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, report no. 23-ST02.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (1992, March). The 1990 science report card: NAEP's assessment of fourth, eighth, and twelfth graders. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, NCES 92-064.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (1991, June). The state of mathematics achievement: NAEP 1990 assessment of the nation and the trial assessment of the states. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, report no. 21-ST-04.

National Center for Education Statistics (1990, July). National education longitudinal study of 1988: A profile of the American eighth grader (NELS:88). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

National Center for Education Statistics (1987). Private schools and private school teachers: Final report of the 1985-86 private school study. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Rohde, Marie. (1991, August 1). Minority test scores at Catholic schools mirror lag in city. *Milwaukee Journal*, p. 1.

Rosenberg, Bella (1990, December/1991, January). Not a case for market control. *Educational Leadership*, volume 48, number 4, pp. 64-65.

Shanker, Albert and Rosenberg, Bella. (1991, Winter). Politics, markets and America's schools: The fallacies of private school choice. Washington, DC: American Federation of Teachers.

Witte, John F., Bailey, Andrea B. and Thorn, Christopher A. (1992, December). Second year report: Milwaukee parental choice program. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Witte, John F. (1991, September). Public subsidies for private schools. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Witte, John F. (1990, August 30-September 3). Understanding high school achievement: After a decade of research, do we have any confident policy recommendations? Paper presented at the 1990 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, CA.

Chapter 7

Reading: Seeing the Big Picture

by John T. Bruer
from *Schools for Thought*.

Beck, I. L. 1981. Reading problems and instructional practices. In T. S. Waller and G.E. MacKinnon, eds., *Reading Research: Advances in Theory and Practice*, volume 2. Academic Press.

Beck, I. L., and Carpenter, P.A. 1986. Cognitive approaches to understanding reading. *American Psychologist* 41(10): 1098-1105.

Beck, I. L., and McKeown, M. G. 1983. Learning words well—a program to enhance vocabulary and comprehension. *Reading Teacher* 36: 622-625.

Beck, I. L., and McKeown, M. G., McCaslin, E., and Burkes, A. 1979. Instructional dimensions that may affect reading comprehension: Examples from two commercial reading programs. Publication 1979/20, Learning Research and Development Center, University of Pittsburgh.

Beck, I. L., and McKeown, M. G., and Omanson, R. C. 1987. The effects and uses of diverse vocabulary instructional techniques. In M. G. McKeown and M. E. Curtis, eds., *The Nature of Vocabulary Acquisition*. Erlbaum.

Beck, I. L., and McKeown, M. G., Sinatra, G. M. and Loxterman, J. A. 1991. Revising social studies text from a text-processing perspective: Evidence of improved comprehensibility. *Reading Research Quarterly* 26: 251-276.

Beck, I. L., Omanson, R. C., and McKeown, M. G. 1982. An instructional redesign of reading lessons: Effects on comprehension. *Reading Research Quarterly* 17: 462-481.

Beck, I. L., Perfetti, C. A., and McKeown, M. G. 1982. Effects of long-term vocabulary instruction on lexical access and reading comprehension. *Journal of Educational Psychology* 74(4): 506-521.

Bransford, J. D., and Johnson, M. K. 1972. Contextual prerequisites for understanding: Some investigations of comprehension and recall. *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior* 11: 717-726.

Brown, A. L., and Palincsar, A. S. 1982. Inducing strategic learning from text by means of informed, self-control training. *Topics in Learning and Learning Disabilities* 2: 1-17.

Brown, A. L., and Palincsar, A. S. 1987. Reciprocal

153

American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader

teaching of comprehension strategies: A natural history of one program for enhancing learning. In J. D. Day and J. G. Borkowski, eds., *Intelligence and Exceptionality: New Directions for Theory, Assessment, and Instructional Practices*. Ablex.

Brown, A. L., and Palincsar, A. S. 1989. Guided, cooperative learning and individual knowledge acquisition. In L. B. Resnick, ed., *Knowing, Learning, and Instruction: Essays in Honor of Robert Glaser*. Erlbaum.

Chall, J. 1983. *Learning to Read: The Great Debate*, second edition. McGraw-Hill.

Hammack, D. C. 1990. *The US History Report Card: The Achievement of Fourth-, Eighth-, and Twelfth-Grade Students in 1988 and Trends from 1986 to 1988 in the Factual Knowledge of High School Juniors*. Educational Testing Service.

Hirsch, E. D. 1987. *Cultural Literacy*. Vintage Books.

Just, M. A., and Carpenter, P. A. 1980. A theory of reading: From eye fixations to comprehension. *Psychological Review* 87: 329-354.

Just, M. A., and Carpenter, P. A. 1987. *The Psychology of Reading and Language Comprehension*. Allyn and Bacon.

Lesgold, A., Resnick, L. B., and Hammond, K. 1985. Learning to read: A longitudinal study of word skill development in two curricula. In G. E. MacKinnon and T. G. Waller, eds., *Reading Research: Advances in Theory and Practice*, volume 4. Academic Press.

McKeown, M. G., and Beck, I. L. 1990. The assessment and characterization of young learners' knowledge of a topic in history. *American Educational Research Journal* 27: 688-726.

Meichenbaum, D. 1985. Teaching thinking: A cognitive-behavioral perspective. In S. F. Chipman, J. W. Segal, and R. Glaser, eds., *Thinking and Learning Skills*, volume 2: *Research and Open Questions*. Erlbaum.

Merton, R. K. 1968. The Matthew Effect in science. *Science* 159: 56-63.

Miller, G. A., and Gildea, P. M. 1987. How children learn words. *Scientific American* 257(3): 94-99.

Mullis, I. V. S., and Jenkins, L. B. 1990. *The Reading Report Card, 1971-88: Trends from the Nation's Report Card*. Office of Educational Research and Improvement, US Department of Education.

Palincsar, A. S., and Brown, A. L. 1984. Reciprocal teaching of comprehension-fostering and comprehension-monitoring activities. *Cognition and Instruction* 1(2): 117-175.

Palincsar, A. S., and Brown, A. L. 1986. Interactive teaching to promote independent learning from text. *Reading Teacher* 39: 771-777.

Palincsar, A. S., Ransom, K., and Derber, S. 1988. Collaborative research and the development of reciprocal teaching. *Educational Leadership* 46: 37-40.

Ravitch, D., and Finn, C. E., Jr. 1987. *What Do Our 17-year-olds Know? A Report on the First National*

Assessment of History and Literature. Harper and Row.

Rayner, K., and Pollatsek, A. 1981. Eye movement control during reading: Evidence for direct control. *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology* 33A: 351-373.

Rayner, K., and Pollatsek, A. 1989. *The Psychology of Reading*. Prentice-Hall.

Rayner, K., Inhoff, A. W., Morrison, R. E., Slowiaczek, M. L., and Bertera, J. H. 1981. Masking of foveal and parafoveal vision during eye fixations in reading. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance* 7: 167-179.

Chapter 8

Higher-Order Thinking Skills for Disadvantaged Students from the U.S. Department of Education's National Assessment of the Chapter 1 Program.

Beyer, B.K., 1984, "Improving Thinking Skills—Defining the Problem." *Phi Delta Kappan* 65(7): 486-90.

Birman, B.F., M.E. Orland, R.K. Jung, R. Anson, and G.N. Garcia (U.S. Department of Education); M.T. Moore, J.E. Funkhouser, and D.R. Morrison (DRC); B.J. Turnbull and E. Reisner (Policy Studies Associates), 1987, *The Current Operation of the Chapter 1 Program*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Brophy, J.E., 1990, "Effective Schooling for Disadvantaged Students." In M.S. Knapp and P.M. Shields, eds., *Better Schooling for the Children of Poverty: Alternatives to Conventional Wisdom*, Vol. II. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Cohen, D.K., and D.L. Ball, 1990, "Policy and Practice: An Overview." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 12(3): 233-39.

Knapp, M.S., and P.M. Shields, 1990, "Reconceiving Academic Instruction for the Children of Poverty." *Phi Delta Kappan* 71(10): 753-58.

Knapp, M.S., and B.J. Turnbull, 1990, *Better Schooling for the Children of Poverty: Alternatives to Conventional Wisdom*, Vol. 1. Study of Academic Instruction for the Disadvantaged series. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Knapp, M.S., B.J. Turnbull, and P.M. Shields, 1990, "New Directions for Educating the Children of Poverty." *Educational Leadership* 48(1): 4-8.

Knapp, M.S., N.E. Adelman, C. Marder, H. McCollum, M.C. Needels, P.M. Shields, B.J. Turnbull, and A.A. Zucker, 1992a *Academic Challenge for the Children of Poverty*, Volume (in progress). Study of Academic Instruction for the Disadvantaged series. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.

Knapp, M.S., P.M. Shields, and B.J. Turnbull, 1992b *Academic Challenge for the Children of Poverty: Summary Report*. Study of Academic Instruction for the Disadvantaged series. Menlo Park, CA: SRI

International.

McGill-Franzen, A., and R.L. Allington, 1991, "The Gridlock of Low Reading Achievement: Perspectives on Practice and Policy." *Remedial and Special Education* 12, no. 3: 20-30.

Means, B., and M.S. Knapp, eds., 1991, *Teaching Advanced Skills to Educationally Disadvantaged Students*. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.

Millsap, M.A., B.J. Turnbull, M. Moss, N. Brigham, B. Gamse, and E. Marks, 1992b, *The Chapter 1 Implementation Study: Interim Report*. Cambridge, MA: Abt Associates Inc.

Mullis, I.V.S., J.A. Dossey, M.A. Foertsch, L.R. Jones, and C.A. Gentile, 1991, *Trends in Academic Progress: Achievement of U.S. Students in Science, 1969-70 to 1990; Mathematics, 1973 to 1990; Reading, 1971 to 1990; and Writing, 1984 to 1990*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Norris, S.P., 1989, "Can We Test Validly for Critical Thinking?" *Educational Researcher* 18(9): 21-26.

Resnick, L.B., 1987, *Education and Learning to Think*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Chapter 9

America's Children and Their Elementary Schools

by David K. Cohen and S.G. Grant from *Daedalus*.

¹John Goodlad, *A Place Called School* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984), 266.

²Ibid., 205-208.

³For a recent review, see Robert Slavin, "Synthesis of Research on Grouping in Elementary and Secondary Schools," *Educational Leadership* (September 1988): 67-76.

⁴Rebecca Barr and Robert Dreeben, *How Schools Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Adam Gamoran, "Instructional and Institutional Effects of Ability Grouping," *Sociology of Education* 59 (1986): 185-98; Richard Allington, "The Reading Instruction Provided Readers Of Differing Abilities," *Elementary School Journal* 83 (1983): 548-59.

⁵C. Fisher, N. Filby, R. Marliave, L. Cahen, M. Dishaw, J. Moore, and D. Berliner, *Teaching Behaviors, Academic Learning Time and Student Achievement*, Final Report of Phase III-B, Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study (San Francisco: Far West Laboratory, 1978). Also see David Berliner, "Tempus Educare," in Penelope Peterson and Herbert Walberg, eds., *Research on Teaching: Concepts, Findings, and Implications* (Berkeley, Calif.: McCutchan, 1979).

⁶Goodlad, *A Place Called School*, 230.

⁷See, for instance, Ibid., 205-206.

⁸Ibid., 108. He reports elsewhere that most class work is "... basic facts and skills." Ibid., 236.

⁹The organization of time among subjects has also been similar across classrooms. See Ibid., 199, Table 7-1.

¹⁰Many commentators now argue that this conception of knowledge has been reinforced by the structure of standardized achievement tests. See Daniel P. Resnick and Lauren B. Resnick, "Standards, Curriculum, and Performance: A Historical and Comparative Perspective," *Educational Researcher* 14 (1985): 5-20.

¹¹See Doris Durkin, "Reading Comprehension Instruction in Five Basal Reader Series," *Reader Research Quarterly* 16 (1981): 515-44.

¹²Jana Mason, Richard Anderson, Akimichi Omura, Nobuko Uchida, and Mutsumi Imai, *Learning to Read in Japan*, Technical Report No. 449 (Urbana, Ill.: Center for the Study of Reading, 1989).

¹³Susan Stodolsky finds that these tendencies are less pronounced in social studies than in arithmetic lessons. See *The Subject Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). John Goodlad reports a similar pattern in the arts, physical education, and vocational education; see Goodlad, *A Place Called School*, 115.

¹⁴Goodlad, *A Place Called School*, 104.

¹⁵Ibid., 229.

¹⁶Ibid., 109.

¹⁷Thomas Rohlen, "Order in Japanese Society: Attachment, Authority and Routine," *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 15 (1) (1989): 5-40.

¹⁸These ideas are as old as public education. Horace Mann complained of drab and dominating teaching in several of his Annual Reports to the Massachusetts Board of Education.

¹⁹Goodlad reports that his team observed "little punitive behavior," Goodlad, *A Place Called School*, 111.

²⁰Ibid., p. 113. For example, though most elementary students in Goodlad's study reported that they "always do what my teacher tells me to do," and "I do all the work that my teacher gives me," they rejected the view that "there was a too strict set of class rules," Ibid., 110.

²¹Goodlad's student respondents reported that their teachers were much more positive than negative toward them; Ibid., 111. American students repeatedly report high levels of satisfaction with school. Most recently, see Committee on Economic Development, *An Assessment of American Education* (New York: Committee on Economic Development, 1992), and A. Powell, E. Farrar, and D. K. Cohen, *The Shopping Mall High School* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985).

²²See Goodlad, *A Place Called School*, 110. D. Freeman, T. Kuhs, A. Porter, R. Floden, W. Schmidt, and J. Schwille, "Do Textbooks and Tests Define a National Curriculum in Elementary School Mathematics?" *The Elementary School Journal* 83 (5) (1983): 501-14. A. Porter et al., "Content Determinants in Elementary School Mathematics," in D.A. Grouws, T. J. Cooney, and D. Jones, eds., *Effective Mathematics Teaching* (Reston: The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, Inc., 1988), 96-113. See also D. J. Freeman and A. C. Porter, "Do Textbooks Dictate the

155

American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader

Content of Mathematics Instruction in Elementary Schools?" *American Educational Research Journal* 26 (3) (Fall 1989).

²³See, for example, D. Stevenson and D. Baker, "State Control of the Curriculum and Classroom Instruction," *Sociology of Education* 64 (1991): 1-10.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵D. K. Cohen and J. S. Spillane, "Policy and Practice: The Relations Between Governance and Instruction," *Review of Research in Education* (Washington, D.C.: American Educational Research Association, April 1992), 3-49.

²⁶U.S. Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics* (Washington, D.C.: US Department of Education, 1990), 47, Table 35. See also John Coons, William Clune, and Stephen Sugarman, *Private Wealth and Public Education* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1970), and Allan Odden, *School Finance Reform in the States* (Denver, Colo.: Education Commission of the States, 1981).

²⁷These figures are in constant 1990 dollars. US Department of Education, *The Condition of Education, Vol. 1 Elementary and Secondary Education* (Washington, D.C.: US Department of Education, 1991), 88.

²⁸Personal communication from Allan Odden, 6 May 1992.

²⁹F. Hess, "Midway Through School Reform In Chicago," *International Journal of Educational Reform* 1 (3) (July 1992): 270-84.

³⁰James Coleman, Ernest Campbell, Carol Hobson, James McPartland, Alexander Mood, Frederic Weinfeld, and Robert York, *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1966). Christopher Jencks, Marshall Smith, Henry Ackland, Mary Jo Bane, David Cohen, Herbert Gintis, Barbara Heyns, and Stephen Michelson, *Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America* (New York: Basic, 1972); E. Hanusheck, "The Economics of Schooling," *Journal of Economic Literature* 24 (3) (September 1986): 1141-177; Coleman et al., *Equality of Educational Opportunity*. One of us (Cohen) was a participant in this line of work.

³¹These conclusions depended on school resources being relatively equally distributed within the United States; nearly all students had schools, books, teachers, and the like. In less developed societies, resources typically are distributed much more unequally, and even the relatively crude measures of resources that were used in these studies turned up much more potent effects for educational resources in less developed societies than in the United States. See Bruce Fuller and Stephen Heyneman, "Third World School Quality: Current Collapse, Future Potential," *Educational Researcher* 18 (1989): 12-19.

³²Thomas Good and Jere Brophy, *Looking in Classrooms*, 4th ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1987). Robert Slavin, Nancy Karweit, and Barbara Wasik,

"Preventing Early School Failure: What Works?" Center For Research On Effective Schooling For Disadvantaged Students (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, August 1991); S. Purkey and M. Smith, "Effective Schools: A Review," *Elementary School Journal* 83 (4) (1983): 428-52. For secondary schools, see A. Bryk and V. Lee, *Catholic High Schools* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, forthcoming).

³³Ibid., 112.

³⁴See Purkey and Smith, "Effective Schools," and Bryk and Lee, *Catholic High Schools*.

³⁵See, for example, Nettie Legters and Robert Slavin, "Elementary Students At Risk," (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, Center for Research on Effective Schooling for Disadvantaged Students, May 1992); Robert Slavin and Nancy Madden, "What Works for Students At Risk: A Research Synthesis," *Educational Leadership* 46 (5) (February 1989): 4-13. Researchers estimate that between 30 and 40 percent of American students are educationally disadvantaged; see Gary Natriello, Edward McDill, and Aaron Pallas, *Schooling Disadvantaged Children: Racing Against Catastrophe* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1990).

³⁶Barr and Dreeben, *How Schools Work*; see also Jeannie Oakes, *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985).

³⁷Some commentators do argue that unequal schooling also results from efforts to reduce it, because state and federal programs intended to improve education for the "educationally deprived" have degraded it instead. Federal programs designed to improve education for the children of the poor created separate classes, commonly termed "pull-outs," where students from disadvantaged circumstances were sent to be taught by teachers who specialized in their kind. The classes made it easier for states and localities to claim that they were meeting federal audit requirements that money only be spent on "target" students, but some researchers now charge that Chapter I created a separate and unequal curriculum in which students have a less substantial and interesting curriculum than their home classes (about 4.2 million elementary school students are served by Chapter I, which is roughly 14 percent of all elementary school students in the United States. This estimate is from Natriello et al., *Schooling Disadvantaged Children*). Students' education also is said to be inchoate, diffuse, and repetitive because there is little coordination between Chapter I and regular instruction. Because Chapter I has been under great political pressure to demonstrate that it improves academic performance, instruction often has been tied to the standardized achievement tests that are used to evaluate programs; students are taught what standardized tests measure. See Anne McGill-Franzen and Richard Allington, "Flunk 'em or Get Them Classified: The Contamination of Accountability and Data," (Albany: SUNY/Albany); and Brenda Turnbull, "Testing in Chapter I: Issues and Options," (Washington, D.C.: Policy Studies Associates, July 1991).

³⁸This estimate is from Natriello et al., *Schooling Disadvantaged Children: Racing Against Catastrophe*.

³⁹See, for example, Lee Shulman, "Those Who Understand, Teach: Knowledge Growth in Teaching," *Educational Researcher* 15 (1986): 4-14, and Magdalene Lampert, "How Do Teachers Manage to Teach? Perspective on Problems in Practice," *Harvard Educational Review* 55 (1985): 178-94.

⁴⁰Educational Testing Service, *America's Challenge: Accelerating Academic Achievement* (Princeton: Educational Testing Service, 1990), Table 3.1.

⁴¹M. Smith and J. O'Day, "Systemic School Reform," in S.H. Fuhrman and B. Malen, eds., *The Politics of Curriculum and Testing* (New York: Falmer, 1991), 233-68.

⁴²Jencks et al., *Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America*; and Hanushek, "The Economics of Schooling."

⁴³See R. Slavin, N. Karweit, and N. Madden, *Effective Programs For Students At Risk* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1989); Slavin, Karweit, and Wasik, "Preventing Early School Failure: What Works?" Center For Research On Effective Schooling For Disadvantaged Students (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, August 1991).

⁴⁴Interviews with Ramon Cortines, San Francisco, February 1992, and Anthony Alvarado, New York City, November 1991. These estimates gain some support from students' and teachers' reports. Five percent of eighth grade teachers report that vandalism is a problem in their schools, and 7 percent report that physical conflict among students is a problem. Only 1.7 percent report that physical abuse of teachers is a problem in their school, but 10 percent report that verbal abuse of teachers is a problem. Students' reports are somewhat different. Eighth grade students agree with teachers on the incidence of verbal abuse of teachers, but they are four times as likely to report physical abuse of teachers as teachers are. And students are twice as likely to report physical conflict among students as teachers, and three times as likely to report that vandalism is a problem. US Department of Education, *Condition of Education*, 80. We are more inclined to accept teachers' reports on everything but physical conflict among students, and we are unsure how seriously to rank conflict among students as a problem in school.

⁴⁵See Marshall Smith, Jennifer O'Day, and David Cohen, "National Curriculum, American Style: What Might It Look Like?" *American Educator* 14 (1990): 10-17.

⁴⁶Post et al., "Intermediate Teachers' Knowledge of Rational Number Concepts"; and Thompson, "The Relationships of Teachers' Conceptions of Mathematics Teaching to Instructional Practice."

⁴⁷See, for example, Shulman, "Those Who Understand, Teach"; Magdalene Lampert, "Knowing, Doing, and Teaching Multiplication," *Cognition and Instruction* 3 (1986): 305-42; Suzanne Wilson, *Mastadons, Maps, and Michigan: Exploring Uncharted Territory While Teaching Elementary School Social Studies* (East Lansing, Mich.: Institute for Research on Teaching, 1990); and Deborah Ball, *Halves, Pieces, and Twos: Constructing Representational Contexts in Teaching Fractions* (East

157
American
Federation
of Teachers:
A QuEST
Reader

Lansing, Mich.: National Center for Research on Teacher Education, 1988).

⁴⁸W. McKeachie, P. Pintrich, Y. Lin, and D. Smith, *Teaching and Learning in the College Classroom: A Review of the Research Literature* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: National Center for Research to Improve Postsecondary Teaching and Learning, 1986).

⁴⁹For further discussion, see D. Cohen and C. Barnes, "A New Pedagogy for Policy?" in D. Cohen, M. McLaughlin, and J. Talbert, *Teaching For Understanding* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993).

⁵⁰For one pertinent account see Elizabeth Kolbert, "School That Battles to Save Small Souls," *New York Times*, 8 November 1991.

⁵¹Though Goodlad, *A Place Called School*, 94, reports little change in junior and senior high schools, he seems to affirm such changes in the primary grades. He notes that his team saw a "... picture of increasing drabness as one moves upward through the grades." Ibid., 227.

⁵²Romiett Stevens, *The Question as a Measure of Efficiency in Instruction* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1912); and Larry Cuban, *How Teachers Taught*.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Stevens, *The Question as a Measure of Efficiency in Instruction*; Cuban, *How Teachers Taught*; and D. Cohen, "Teaching Practice: Plus ça Change . . .," National Center for Research on Teacher Education (Michigan: Michigan State University, 1988).

⁵⁵Larry Cuban, *Teachers and Machines: The Classroom Use of Technology Since 1920* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1986); David Cohen, "Teaching Practice: Plus ça Change . . ."; David Cohen, "Educational Technology and School Organization," in Raymond Nickerson and Philip Zoghbiates, eds., *Technology in Education: Looking Toward 2020* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1988). See also Charles Piller and Liza Weiman, "America's Computer Ghetto," *New York Times*, 2 August 1992.

Chapter 10

Restructuring Teacher Compensation Systems

by Allan R. Odden and Sharon Conley from *Rethinking School Finance*.

American Federation of Teachers. (1990). *Survey and analysis of salary trends*. Washington, DC.: Author.

Arfin, D. M. (1986). The use of financial aid to attract talented students to teaching: Lessons from other fields. *Elementary School Journal*, 86, 405-424.

Bacharach, S. B., Conley, S., & Shedd, J. (1986). Beyond career ladders: Structuring teacher career development systems. *Teachers College Record*, 87, 563-574.

Bacharach, S. B., Conley, S., & Shedd, J. (1987). A career development framework for evaluating teachers as decision makers. *Journal of Personnel Evaluation*, 1, 181-194.

Bacharach, S. B., Conley, S., & Shedd, J. (1990).

Evaluating teachers for career awards and merit pay. In J. Millman & L. Darling-Hammond (Eds.), *The new handbook of teacher evaluation: Assessing elementary and secondary teachers* (pp. 133-146). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Bacharach, S. B., Lipsky, D., & Shedd, J. (1983). *Teacher compensation systems*. Manuscript submitted to the Research Division of the National Education Association, Washington, DC.

Bacharach, S. B., Lipsky, D., & Shedd, J. (1984). *Merit pay and its alternatives*. Ithaca, NY: Organizational Analysis & Practice.

Blinder, A. (1990). *Paying for productivity*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.

Bruno, J. (1981). Design of incentive systems for staffing racially isolated schools in large urban school districts. *Journal of Education Finance*, 7, 149-167.

Buchman, M. (1987). *Teaching knowledge: The lights that teachers live by* (Issue paper 87-1). East Lansing: Michigan State University, Center for Research on Teacher Education.

Burden, P. R. (1982, February). *Developmental supervision: Reducing teacher stress at different career stages*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators, Phoenix, AZ. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 218 267).

Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy. (1986). *A nation prepared: Teachers for the 21st century*. Washington, DC: Author.

Carnegie Task Force. (1989). *Turning points: Preparing American youth for the 21st century*. New York: Carnegie Corporation.

Carter, K. (1991). Creating a teacher work environment for the development of classroom knowledge. In S.C. Conley & B.S. Cooper (Eds.), *The school as a work environment: Implications for reform* (pp. 42-64). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Carter, K., Cushing, K., Sabers, D., Brown, P., & Berliner, D. (1988). Expert-novice differences in perceiving and processing visual classroom information. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 38 25-31.

Conley, S. C., & Bacharach, S. B. (1990). Performance appraisal in education: A strategic consideration. *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education*, 3, 309-319.

Conley, S. C., & Cooper, B. S. (Eds.). (1991). *The school as a work environment: Implications for reform*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Cooper, J. M. (n.d.). *Differentiated staffing: Some questions and answers*. Unpublished manuscript.

Darling-Hammond, L. (1984). *Beyond the commission reports: The coming crisis in teaching*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

Deal, T.E., & Peterson, K. D. (1990). *The principal's role in shaping school culture*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

- Deming, W. E. (1987). *The merit system: The annual appraisal, destroyer of people*. Paper presented at A Day with Dr. W. Edwards Deming, University of Minnesota.
- Dimensions. (1990, January 17). *Education Week*, p. 3.
- Educational Research Service. (1979). *Merit pay for teachers*. Arlington, VA: Author.
- Feiman-Nemser, S., & Buchman, M. (1985). Pitfalls of experience in teacher preparation. *Teachers College Record*, 87, 53-65.
- Ferris, J., & Winkler, D. (1986). Teacher compensation and the supply of teachers. *Elementary School Journal*, 86, 389-404.
- Firestone, W., Fuhrman, S., & Kirst, M. W. (1989). *Progress of reform*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, Consortium for Policy Research in Education.
- Freiberg, J. (1985). Master teacher programs: Lessons from the past. *Educational Leadership*, 42(4), 16-21.
- Futrell, M. (1986). Career ladders: An NEA perspective. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 13(4), 60-65.
- Gitlin, A. (1990). Understanding teaching dialogically. *Teachers College Record*, 91, 537-563.
- Goodlad, J. (1983). *A place called school*. New York: Macmillan.
- Griffin, G. (1985). The school as a workplace and the master teacher concept. *Elementary School Journal*, 86(1), 1-16.
- Gupta, N., Schweizer, T. P., & Jenkins, G. D., Jr. (1987). Pay-for-knowledge compensation plans: Hypotheses and survey results. *Monthly Labor Review*, 110(10), 40-43.
- Hanushek, E. (1989). The impact of differential expenditures on school performance. *Educational Researcher*, 18(4), 45-51.
- Hawley, W. D. (1985). Designing and implementing performance-based career ladder plans. *Educational Leadership*, 43(3), 57-61.
- Hawley, W. D., & Rosenholtz, S. (Eds.). (1984). Good schools: What research says about improving student achievement [Special issue]. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 61(4).
- Holmes Group. (1986). *Tomorrow's teachers*. East Lansing, MI: Author.
- Jacobson, S. (1988a). Alternative practices of internal salary distribution and their effects on teacher recruitment and retention. *Journal of Education Finance*, 14, 274-284.
- Jacobson, S. (1988b). The effects of pay incentives on teacher absenteeism. *Journal of Human Resources*, 24, 280-286.
- Johnson, S. M. (1984). *The pros and cons of merit pay*. Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa.
- Johnson, S. M. (1990). *Teachers at work: Achieving success in our schools*. New York: Basic Books.
- Johnston, W. (1987). *Workforce 2000*. Indianapolis, IN: Hudson Institute.
- Lampert, M., & Clark, C. M. (1990). Expert knowledge and expert thinking in teaching: A response to Floden and Klinzing. *Educational Researcher*, 19(5), 21-23.
- Lawler, E. E., III. (1986). *High-involvement management: Participative strategies for improving organizational performance*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Lawler, E. E., III. (1990). *Strategic pay: Aligning organizational strategies and pay systems*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Lawler, E. E., Ledford, G. E., & Mohrman, S. A. (1989). *Employee involvement in America*. Houston, TX: American Productivity and Quality Center.
- Lieberman, A. (1988). *Building a professional culture in schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Little, J. W. (1982). Norms of collegiality and experimentation: Workplace conditions of school success. *American Educational Research Journal*, 19, 325-340.
- Little, J. W. (1987). Teachers as colleagues. In V. Richardson-Koehler (Ed.), *Educators' handbook: A research perspective* (pp. 491-518). White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Little, J. W. (1990). The persistence of privacy: Autonomy and initiative in teachers' professional relations. *Teachers College Record*, 91(4), 507-536.
- Manassee, L. (1985). Improving conditions for principal effectiveness: Policy implications of research. *Elementary School Journal*, 85, 439-463.
- McLaughlin, M. W., & Pfeifer, S. (1988). *Teacher evaluations: Improvement, accountability and effective learning*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- McLaughlin, M. W., & Yee, S. M. (1988). School as a place to have a career. In A. Lieberman (Ed.), *Building a professional culture in schools* (pp. 23-44). New York: Teachers College Press.
- McLoone, E. (1988). The changing conditions of teacher retirement systems. In K. Alexander and D. Monk (Eds.), *Attracting and compensating America's teachers* (pp. 223-248). New York: Ballinger.
- Mohrman, A. M. (1989). *Deming versus performance appraisal: Is there a resolution?* Los Angeles: University of Southern California, Center for Effective Organizations.
- Murnane, R. J. (1981). Seniority rules and educational productivity: Understanding the consequences of a mandate for equality. *American Journal of Education*, 90, 14-38.
- Murnane, R. J. (1983). Quantitative studies of effective schools: What have we learned? In A. R. Odden & L. D. Webb (Eds.), *School finance and school improvement: Linkages for the 1980s* (pp. 193-209). New York: Ballinger.
- Murnane, R. J., & Cohen, D. K. (1986). Merit pay and

- the evaluation problem: Why some merit pay plans fail and a few survive. *Harvard Educational Review*, 56(1), 1-17.
- Murphy, J. (1989). Principal instructional leadership. In L. S. Lotto & P. W. Thurston (Eds.), *Recent advances in educational administration* (Vol. 1). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). *A nation at risk: Imperative for reform*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Perlman, L. (1989). *Closing education's technology gap* (Briefing Paper No. 111). Indianapolis, IN: Hudson Institute.
- Popkewitz, T. S., & Lind, L. (1989). Teacher incentives as reforms: Teachers' work and the changing control mechanism in education. *Teachers College Record*, 90, 575-593.
- Porter, A., & Brophy, J. (1988). Good teaching: Insights from the work of the Institute for Research on Teaching. *Educational Leadership*, 45(8), 75-84.
- Porter, L. W., Lawler, E. E., & Hackman, J. R. (1975). *Behavior in organizations*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Purkey, S. C., & Smith, M. (1983). Effective schools: A synthesis. *Elementary School Journal*, 83, 427-452.
- Richards, C. (1988). State regulation of entry level teacher salaries: Policy issues and options. *Educational Policy*, 2, 307-322.
- Richardson, V. (1991). How and why teachers change. In S. C. Conley & B. S. Cooper (Eds.), *The school as a work environment: Implications for reform*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Rosenholtz, S. J. (1985a). Effective schools: Interpreting the evidence. *American Journal of Education*, 93, 352-388.
- Rosenholtz, S. J. (1985b). Political myths about education reform: Lessons from research on teaching. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 66, 349-355.
- Rosenholtz, S. J. (1989). *Teachers' workplace: The social organization of schools*. White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Rosenholtz, S. J., & Smylie, M. A. (1984). Teacher compensation and career ladders. *Elementary School Journal*, 85, 149-166.
- Schlechty, P. C. (1989). Career ladders: A good idea going awry. In T. J. Sergiovanni & J. H. Moore (Eds.), *Schooling for tomorrow: Directing reforms to issues that count* (pp. 356-375). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Schlechty, P. C., & Vance, V. (1983). Recruitment, selection and retention: The shape of the teaching force. *Elementary School Journal*, 83, 469-487.
- Sedlak, M. W. (1987). Tomorrow's teachers: The essential argument of the Holmes Group Report. In J. F. Soltis (Ed.), *Reforming teacher education* (pp. 4-15). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Sergiovanni, T. (1990). *Value-added leadership*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Shanker, A. (1990). The end of the traditional model of schooling—and a proposal for using incentives to restructure our public schools. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 71, 344-357.
- Smith, M. S., & O'Day, J. (1988). *Teaching policy and research on teaching*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University, Center for Education Research at Stanford.
- Smith, M. S., & O'Day, J. (1991). Systemic school reform. In S. Fuhrman & B. Malen (Eds.), *The politics of curriculum and testing* (pp. 233-267). Philadelphia: Falmer.
- Southern Regional Education Board. (1990). *Career ladder clearinghouse*. Atlanta, GA: Author.
- Tennessee Education Association. (1988, January). The sublime has become the ridiculous. *Tennessee Education Association News*, p. 2.
- Timar, T. B., & Kirp, D. L. (1987). Educational reform and institutional competence. *Harvard Educational Review*, 57, 308-330.
- Tosi, H., & Tosi, L. (1986). What managers need to know about knowledge-based pay. *Organizational Dynamics*, 14(3), 52-64.
- Von Glinow, M. A., & Mohrman, S. A. (1989). *Managing complexity in high-technology organizations*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Walberg, H. J. (1990). Productive teaching and instruction: Assessing the knowledge base. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 71, 470-478.
- Watson, R. S., Poda, J. W., & Miller, C. T. (1987). What a state mandated merit pay plan taught us. *Executive Educator*, 9(7).
- White House, The. (1990). *National goals for education*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Wilson, B., & Corcoran, T. (1987). *Places where children succeed: A profile of outstanding elementary schools*. Philadelphia: Research for Better Schools.
- Wilson, B., & Corcoran, T. (1988). *Successful secondary schools*. Philadelphia: Falmer.
- Wise, A. E., & Darling-Hammond, L. (1985). Teacher evaluation and teacher professionalism. *Educational Leadership*, 42(4), 28-33.
- Wise, A. E., & Darling-Hammond, L. (1987). *Licensing teachers: Design for a teaching profession*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.
- Wittrock, M. (Ed.). (1986). *Handbook of research on teaching* (3rd ed.). New York: Macmillan.
- Yee, S. M. (1986, April). *Teaching as a career: Promotion versus development*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco.



164

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS
555 NEW JERSEY AVE. NW
WASHINGTON, DC 20001
202/638-5600

165

BEST COPY AVAILABLE